

N.J. Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired (CBVI)  
**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**

Meeting Minutes – February 1, 2019

Joseph Kohn Training Center - 130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

**Voting Members Present:** Pamela Aasen, Gary Altman, Rick Fox, Jonathan Goodman, Susan Head, Clarke King, Pat McKenna, Kelly Reymann, William Robinson, Evangelia Stone, Kris Tucker

**Absent:** Jennifer Armstrong-Ekelmann, Ida Behreini, Alice Eaddy, Lisa Killion-Smith, Damian Petino, John Tkacz

**Ex Officio Present:** Bernice Davis, Amanda Gerson, Danielle Licari-Scorzelli

**Staff/Members of Public Present:** Aaliyah Dent, Diana Cortez, John Reiff

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The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Rick Fox, Chairperson. He announced that the meeting was being held in compliance with Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act 1973, as amended; also in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6. Rick thanked everyone for attending today's meeting.

Rick acknowledged that CBVI now has a permanent Executive Director; he congratulated Dr. Davis and noted he looks forward to working with her in a productive fashion over the next several years.

Rick welcomed the three Service Center managers to today's meeting. He thanked them for attending, and noted that he appreciates their time in giving the SRC an overview of what they do.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

The meeting minutes of December 7, 2018, were reviewed. A motion was made by Evangelia Stone, and seconded by Jonathan Goodman, to approve these minutes; all were in favor. The minutes were accepted and will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

## **Service Center Managers**

Aaliyah Dent, Newark Service Center Manager (northern region)

John Reiff, Freehold Service Center Manager (central region)

Diana Cortez, Cherry Hill Service Center Manager (southern region)

The managers introduced themselves and gave a brief summary of their history, qualifications, experience, and responsibilities. They reviewed the procedure involved when someone requests the services of the Agency. They also discussed the challenges and opportunities in their respective centers.

Following are a few of the goals the managers have set to enhance the work being done in the Service Centers:

- High quality, timely service delivery
- Outreach to other State agencies, as well as the local community, to better serve consumers in a more comprehensive way
- Compliance with WIOA, as well as State policies and procedures
- Pursue Affordable Care Act (ACA) certification (navigator status) for eye health nurses
- Community outreach focus for eye health nurses
- Managers to re-engage in going out in the field with professional staff
- The idea of putting together a “what to expect summary” on the Agency’s website or doing a brief informational video, and making that accessible, is being discussed.

Rick thanked the managers for coming to today’s meeting to share their wisdom and enthusiasm. He commented that the organization he represents is eager to assist, if needed.

## **Statewide Update – Bernice Davis, Executive Director:**

Bernice thanked the managers, and commented that CBVI is fortunate to have a wonderfully dedicated, diverse, multi-talented staff; very proud of the work we do and the people we have as part of our team.

She also noted her pleasure and honor to be a part of CBVI, serving as the Acting Executive Director for 10 months, and now as the Executive Director; honored to continue to put forth good, effective work in helping blind people, visually impaired people, and deaf/blind people live the lives they really want to live.

- Federal Shutdown – CBVI’s Federal funding, which comes from the Department of Education, was approved toward the end of 2018; there were no negative effects from the shutdown to our VR services, and we are not anticipating any for 2019.

- Bernice noted that she would like to revive and expand the Agency's outreach initiatives in the following areas; promoting services and programs.
  - Community outreach - need to interface with where people are in their community; i.e. churches, recreation centers, schools.
  - Municipal offices, county offices; collaborating more with other agencies within the Department of Human Services (DHS).
  - Ophthalmologists/optometrists
  - Professional associations
  - Stakeholders
  - Meet/Greets with colleges and universities that have programs for Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Orientation & Mobility instructors, due to the shortage of these professionals.
  - LEAP (Library Equal Access Program) statewide for our consumers 55+. We want more people to know about this program. Transportation does appear to be one issue for consumers attending this program in the Newark Public Library; Access Link drop-off point is not easily accessible. We also need to get the word out about this program through our counselors and ILOB staff, just letting consumers know about this resource. Kris Tucker offered to look into the Access Link issue at 5 Washington Street, Newark Public Library Main Branch.

SRC members shared their experiences and outreach ideas.

Bernice noted that CBVI's goal is to get information into the hands of anybody who needs the Agency's services. Would like to give presentations about the Commission's services. We want to get the message out that people can be independent and have full lives with blindness/visual impairments.

Bernice noted she would like to bring on an outreach liaison; many of our staff are out delivering services to consumers, so although there are opportunities where we can go out and speak about our services, we don't have enough staff to do that without taking away from direct services. Would like to have a very robust internship program; would like to widen internship experiences so they can support the outreach calls, and they're learning about Commission services and spreading the word in their community.

With regard to outreach, Bernice shared a postcard that was developed recently and is being utilized at the Agency. She reviewed the information contained on the postcard. She had a supply there for any of the members that would like to share with their constituents. Anyone interested in an addition supply should contact Chris Cooper.

- Bernice commented that she'd also like to bring on a social worker. We used to have social workers at each service center. The social worker would connect our staff and consumers with resources; could also help interns as well.
- Bernice reported on a public relations U-Tube video that DHS did about CBVI's services at the Meyer Center. It features the educational resource materials, braille, and large print books that are made there; adaptive equipment. It has been reported that there are close to 1000 views of this video already! DHS posts on Facebook and Twitter too. Bernice noted that she'd also like to see a welcome video done, as well as something to highlight JKTC services. Bernice also welcomed any ideas from the SRC in this regard.
- CBVI's case management program: a new system is still in the assessment phase; looking at the Aware/Alliance product, which is fabulous for VR; however, it might not be so inclusive for our other programs – IL, Education. Also looking at a FACTs update that Libera is promoting. Talking to people all over the country that are using both systems and are in the same boat as we are. Each of the upgrades will take a year or two; will keep the SRC posted.
- Mississippi University has the responsibility of conducting a customer service questionnaire – after our consumers have completed our ILOB program. In 2017 we received a very good rating of 86%; consumers were very happy with our older blind services. The numbers for 2018 just came through and we went up in terms of customer satisfaction, all the way up to 92%. Bernice commented that it's a great reflection on the dedication and good work our staff are doing.
- The Agency is looking for 13 temporary drivers to support our SHARP program for 6 weeks; this is a summer program dedicated to our youth (starts July 30); drivers all have to be 25 + based on insurance liability. If anyone knows of anyone looking for this type of work, please send them our way. Amanda will share the job description with the SRC.

#### **Amanda Gerson – SRC appointments:**

Amanda reviewed the latest SRC appointments:

- Pamela Aasen, Pat McKenna, Clarke King, Damian Petino, Ida Behreini, Alice Eaddy (appointment)
- Jennifer Armstrong-Ekelmann, Gary Altman (re-appointment)
- Evangelia Stone (appointed in December, 2017)

Everyone present acknowledged receiving their appointment documentation from the Governor's office. Amanda thanked everyone for their patience during this process. Rick congratulated everyone on these appointments.

Amanda noted there are a couple of members whose first term is ending, and are going to need to be re-appointed, should they desire, that is: Jonathan Goodman, Susan Head, and William Robinson. Please forward updated resumes/contact information to Amanda as soon as possible. Amanda noted that Kelly Reymann's second term is ending; April will be her last meeting. Amanda noted that Kelly has served 6 years on the SRC, and has done a great job in her seat as a community rehab provider representative. Rick thanked Kelly for her service too. Amanda noted that Danielle Licari-Scorzelli's second term will also be up in December, 2019.

### **Amanda Gerson, VR Update:**

- Amanda had a supply of the Business Relations Unit's (BRU) new brochure, which outlines what the BRU does. Anyone interested in taking a look at it, or sharing with their constituents, was encouraged to pick up a few copies following the meeting. Additional supply is available for anyone interested in receiving.
- A transition supervisor position has been posted; someone to provide assistance and direct supervision to transition counsellors. This employee will report directly to Amanda, and will supervise all transition and deaf blind counsellors.
- Request For Information (RFI): Amanda explained that the Agency is redoing the supported employment program to better provide job development, job coaching, and those related services. An RFI will be submitted to the Department, so we can reach out to community rehabilitation providers, as well as our stakeholders and the community, to receive feedback on what sort of things we can and should do in preparation to complete a Request For Proposal/letters of interest, depending on how we structure it. Essentially, we'd like to form our own contracts with the providers, where we can provide a higher level of support, and a higher level of oversight with a smaller number of agencies than we are working with now. Amanda noted that she will also work on an RFI around pre-employment transition services; want to do our due diligence to make sure there aren't any other entities and we remain competitive. Amanda commented that we'll do RFI's on any other programs that people would like to see developed for our pre-employment transition services; seeing if there's anything we can complement.
- Administrative Code 10:91: A draft has been developed and shared with Deputy Commissioner Neira. There are a couple of tweaks to be made – that process should go smoothly. Expected to be posted for public comments within the next couple of months. Then CBVI responds to the comments, and it then goes into effect. Amanda explained the reason we did this Code first was there are two aspects that really needed to be addressed. One is that we have our fee schedule in 10:91, which means we can't change the fee schedule without changing the Code. We are now proposing that it be tied to Medicaid rates and published at a regular interval. The second issue in the Code that needed to be treated similarly is our Financial Needs Survey; it has also not been adjusted in 12-15 years. We are consulting with a couple other Department agencies to see how they handle financial needs testing. We are looking at tying it somehow to the federal poverty limit; we'll remove it from the code, comment what we're basing it on, point to where it can be found, and at what frequency it will be reviewed formally.

- Administrative Code 10:95, which is the VR Code, will then be reviewed to bring it into compliance with the federal regulations. Amanda noted she is hoping to have a solid draft completed by May or June.
- VR challenge - The WIOA regulations now require individuals be followed for a full year after exiting the program. The Agency needs to formally verify (2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, at a minimum) their employment and wages. In looking at our closures from the full first program year, we are only matching employment and wage data for about 20% of our closures. Of the approximate 200 individuals we assisted in maintaining/obtaining employment, only matching about 40. Amanda noted that we have a data share agreement with the Department of Labor, but for some reason we are not matching as much as we should. Will be reaching out to Labor to see if it's an issue with the way we are pulling their data, or if there's another issue we are not aware of. The Agency is also looking at an Equifax product to assist in this process. Gary noted that if this is Equifax as a third party to help supplement your data, there have been organizations for decades that have attempted to sell services like that; it's just another source. He commented that the Agency might be more successful looking at whether there are agreements the DOL has with the federal government, because a lot of whether its military or federal services, they may not show up in the regular review of data; may have to go to secondary sources like the federal payroll. The issue with people who are working off the books or maybe working for cash, day laborers, was discussed. Amanda also noted that we can even have a consumer self-certify or their employer self-certify their employment and wage information for that given quarter. The problem we're having is people not getting back to us. Amanda noted that we had hoped unemployment wage match would get us the vast majority of our wages. Thankfully we have an extra two quarters to update the information. Amanda commented on a great conversation her, Bernice, and Deputy Commissioner Neira had with the DOL Assistant Commissioner, Hugh Bailey. We introduced our Agency VR program, and discussed how we can start being more collaborative with our other workforce partners. Amanda thanked Gary for introducing her to Mr. Bailey at the last SETC meeting. CBVI will be attending a meeting in March with the rest of the units in the workforce program that do business engagement, to make sure everybody knows what everybody else does; all on message; doing what we need to be doing.
- The BRU had been responsible for 8-10 successful closures in 2018; that's about 5% of the total closures for the year. One of the closures is CTDI, and they are willing to hire even more people from us and DVR; we've had 2 placements so far. However, the challenge is transportation (they are off the bus line). They've been working with NJ Transit and the mayor is getting involved as well, to see if we can advocate and find a solution. Obviously, that would benefit not just CBVI and DVRS consumers, but a lot of employees who may opt to take public transportation. In the meantime, we are helping identify other options like car-pooling, Uber, ride share, where maybe individuals can do a combination of public transit, Access Link, and other solutions.

- Continued focus on quality assurance and data integrity process. Case reviews are starting back up; the policy that was created is being re-implemented this month. Also working on sending out reports, doing more regular reports to make sure our data is accurate. Had issues making sure, at placement and closure, that hourly wage is accurate. The 3 managers are great partners with Amanda, making sure we are staying on top of our data integrity.
- New Approach to oversight of 511. CBVI is welcoming back staff, Jenna Finley, who will oversee the 511 compliance statewide, and also carry a supported employment caseload. A pilot will take place in Newark, asking the VR counselors to identify a couple of people off of their caseload who are supported employment consumers that could benefit from a little more assistance, some better wrap around supports, and try out that specialized caseload again, and see if we can improve the quality of our relationships by having one individual working with our supported employment consumers and supported employment agencies in the northern region, as well as having somebody really gain the expertise in the services and supports and partner agencies that serve that segment of our population. Amanda will report on 511 compliance at the next meeting.

Jonathan asked if consideration is still being given to go into an Order of Selection. Amanda noted that this is something we will continue to look at; it's just not a high priority at this time. She explained that we continue to look good on our budget, carrying over funds every year. She commented that we've been working on fiscal compliance; following policies and being fiscally conservative. Bernice commented that it's pertinent that we continuously look at all of our resources, and we keep everyone abreast of the realities of what we can do and what things need to be staggered; always being conservative and thoughtful about service programs. Amanda noted that the Affordable Care Act had a positive impact on budgets in multiple programs, VR as well as IL, and ILOB, in that the amount of money we spent on fiscal restoration, other eye health related services, has significantly decreased because individuals now have access to affordable health care, particularly through Medicaid expansion. So that's been a huge fiscal help for us; fiscal restoration and eye health services had been one of our highest categories of expenditures.

Rick thanked Amanda for her comprehensive report.

### **Sub Committee Reports:**

Annual Report: Amanda reported that the SRC successfully submitted the 2018 Annual Report to RSA ten days early this year; getting the appropriate approvals through the Department first. Will be working now on getting the publication ready; glossy version.

Resource/Business Relations and Policy & Procedure sub-committees had nothing new to report.

Rick invited any member, who is not already on a sub-committee and would like to be, to get in touch with him or Amanda to be assigned to one.

## **Old/New Business:**

William Robinson shared information from a recent Randolph Sheppard meeting, and NABA training, he attended in Washington DC. He noted that NJ will be one of the first states to try and pass a law to eliminate all plastic, which would hurt a lot of small business. Working on steps to try to slow it down or stop this. Another highlight of this meeting, William shared information on a company called WayAround. They have developed an app for your smart device that provides on-demand details about everyday things. The simple tag-and-scan approach lets you quickly and easily identify things around you. It also provides extra details, like how something works or when it expires. They were at the meeting to ask for our input, to give ideas to see what they can do to make this product better. Working with a lot of people to make things better for the blind consumer, as well as the blind business owner.

Rick noted that he was in DC as well; he summarized three issues that the National Federation of the Blind brought to congress: 1) a proposal to institute a 3-year refundable federal tax credit of \$2000 for an individual to buy assistive technology. 2) Access Board, which is a federal standard setting agency, to develop standards of accessibility for home appliances, fitness equipment, and home medical equipment. 3) reform of the Ability 1 Program, which is the sheltered shops, and to have the bidding for those federal contracts, which is 3.5 billion dollars worth of federal, set aside to be open to for-profits, as well as the specialized non-profits in the NIB program. This would be for blind and severely disabled people. Rick commented that if we could reform the Ability 1 Program, so people would earn the minimum or prevailing wage that the contract would deal with people not only in direct labor positions, but in managerial positions, we could maybe increase employment in those programs. Rick noted that he will report at each meeting as to what bills are on the table, if anybody wants to make phone calls for those. If anybody wants the fact sheets that went along with the programs, email Rick and he will forward.

Evangelia Stone noted that she would like to recommend that the Deputy Commissioner of DHS attend an upcoming SRC meeting to answer questions about the Executive Director hiring process. Evangelia commented that she doesn't understand fully why it took a year; why they kept moving the application deadline back. Rick asked for any discussion on this; hearing no discussion, and on a second motion by Jonathan Goodman, a vote was taken; all were in favor. Rick will write a formal letter to the Deputy Commissioner, cc'ing Bernice, from the SRC, requesting her to attend an upcoming meeting.

Kris Tucker provided an Access Link update. The software continues to be tested in order to improve the website and enhance it so customers can make reservations on line, cancel reservations on line, receive an estimate of the timeframe that the vehicles will arrive to pick them up. It can update customer account information, and they can use Easy Wallet – electronic fair option. As of yesterday there were 1,193 current Access Link customers set up to go on line and test the website out; 500 of those customers actually got on and started;



330 customers who actually made reservations – they’ve made over 7000 Access Link reservations on line; 247 customers have added money into their Easy Wallet account. Kris noted that they are actively working on resolving concerns that have come up during testing for their customers. If there is anyone who knows a current Access Link customer who might be interested in helping test this new website, they should send an email to [ACES@NJTRANSIT.com](mailto:ACES@NJTRANSIT.com). Rick asked, when Access Link arrives at a pick-up, is it possible to announce their arrival via text. Kris noted that another team will be assigned to work on that; it’s coming down the pike. Kelly Reymann shared a collaboration with Access Link taking place next week at JKTC. A workshop series is planned with SSP NJ (TCNJ deaf-blind program); Kris Tucker has been invited to present on Access Link. This workshop series has been organized to help increase the quality of services for deaf blind consumers; to train and empower SSPs; give them more confidence and greater access to information.

Susan Head noted that DRNJ’s Executive Director, Joe Young, retired after over 20 yrs. The new Executive Director’s name is Gwen Orlowski.

Rick reported that the SRC vice-chair position has been vacant since he took over as Chairperson. He commented that he thinks it’s important for someone to be appointed in case he is ever unable to attend an agenda or SRC meeting. In addition, he noted that he has approximately 18 months left in his term, so will need someone then. He noted that he’d like to nominate Evangelia Stone as vice-chair. He commented that Evangelia is a hard worker and very much a part of our community. He asked if there were any other nominations. Hearing none, a vote was taken; all were in favor. Rick thanked Evangelia for offering for the duty; he congratulated her and noted he’d discuss the details with her before the first agenda meeting.

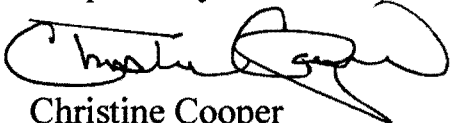
### **Adjournment**

Rick thanked everyone for attending today’s meeting.

A motion was made by Evangelia Stone, and seconded by Jonathan Goodman, to adjourn the meeting; all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 5, 2019.

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Cooper  
CBVI – Administrative Assistant