

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

Meeting Minutes – October 4, 2019
Joseph Kohn Training Center - 130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

Voting Members Present: Pamela Aasen, Gary Altman, Ida Behreini, Alice Eaddy, Rick Fox, Jonathan Goodman, Susan Head, Clarke King, Pat McKenna, William Robinson, Evangelia Stone, John Tkacz, Kris Tucker

Present (pending appointment): Kathleen Spata

Absent: Jennifer Armstrong-Ekelmann, Lisa Killion-Smith

Ex Officio Present: Bernice Davis, Amanda Gerson

Staff/Members of Public Present: Delavar Basha, Deacon Truesdale

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Rick Fox, Chairperson. Rick announced that this 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.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes of June 7, 2019 were reviewed. There were no amendments, corrections, or additions recommended. On a motion made by Gary Altman, and seconded by Alice Eaddy, all were in favor of approving these minutes; they will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

Delavar Basha, Manager of the Joseph Kohn Training Center: Del explained that The Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) offers people who are blind and visually impaired an opportunity to learn skills that enable independence. JKTC's program is for individuals 18 years or older who are blind or visually impaired, have exited from their secondary school program, and want to learn the independent living skills that will enable them to be integrated into their community. Students gain skills to attend college, to seek employment, or become independent homemakers. Del reviewed the curriculum, a bit of information on each of the instructors, and the residential component of the program. He described several of the recreational trips, as well as the guest presenters that have been arranged for the students. He welcomed any ideas or leads for any individuals who would like to present for this program. Del took several minutes to answer specific questions regarding the program. One of the members suggested contacting one of the Paralympics clubs in NJ regarding a presentation.

Additional information on the JKTC program can be found on-line by searching: NJ CBVI State website: www.state.nj.us/humanservices/cbvi/

Rick thanked Del for his informative presentation on the JKTC program.

Deacon Truesdale, Manager of Business Enterprise NJ (BENJ): Deacon explained that BENJ operates under the Randolph Sheppard (RS) Act. The RS Act, enacted into law in 1936, was intended to enhance employment opportunities for trained, licensed, blind/vision impaired persons to operate vending facilities in Federal and State buildings. The United States Department of Education (DOE) oversees the RS program throughout the nation; each State is called a state licensing agency. BENJ recruits consumers/clients from our VR program, who are interested in self-employment. Eligibility requirements: at least 18 years of age; legally blind; HS diploma (or GED); pass a background check, and be a US citizen. Once in the program we have further requirements: ADL (Activities of Daily Living) skills; skills of independence, mobility, traveling, and technology. Once it is established that the person is eligible, training begins. An on-line course with the Hadley Institute for the Blind takes place. It is a wonderful program that offers 11 modules in training for Business Enterprises. It is a self-paced course that takes about 3-7 months to complete. Once finished, they are assigned a field representative, who assists them with training at our different facilities. The blind managers, who are already licensed and running a facility, assist with the training also. As well as working with the trainees, the field reps. work with our blind managers at their locations. There are snack bars, which are similar to a 7-11/Quick Check, where they sell a variety of different snack foods, drinks, some have lottery machines. We also have cafeterias (one here at JKTC); military cafeterias as well. There are also vending facilities (machines that can vend a variety of soft drinks, snacks, or personal care items). The other type of facilities we delve into are called micro-markets. These are unmanned markets/stores that sell healthy items; fresher food items, such as salads, sandwiches, snacks, and drinks. After the Hadley course, they train at 3 different types of locations; 3 weeks at each location. After that, there is additional training regarding rules/regulations. Deacon explained "active participation", which means that the blind managers of the program have an active say of how the program actually runs; the blind managers have a say in how the rules/regulations are developed; any changes that happen in the program they have a say as well. The trainees also learn about proper food safety and handling techniques (2-week training). Then the trainee, still working on licensing, gets the opportunity to bid on a location or start working at a location. When a location becomes available, the licensed blind manager has priority over any trainee or licensed manager who is not currently working. If there is no licensed manager who bids on the location, and the trainee bids, they have the opportunity to operate that location for up to 6-months while working on becoming licensed. They are being evaluated and must be successful for the entire 6-month period of operating that location – that means doing paperwork on time, doing weekly sales reports/income, showing good customer service skills, completing sales taxes properly, as well as showing a net profit.

After the 6 months, and becoming a licensed blind manager, they have the same rights as any other licensed manager within RS. Licenses can transfer to another state; depends on requirements. Deacon noted that BENJ is always working on obtaining new locations, as well as recruitment. Right now looking into the possibility of facilities at state parks; looking at the proper way of obtaining additional micro markets. Deacon pointed out that there has not been a lot of women in the program; there's a nation-wide initiative now called the Women Initiative Support and Entrepreneurship, to include more women within RS. BENJ is actively seeking additional women within our VR program. Happy to say that there are 3 women in training right now. Deacon answered questions from the SRC members regarding the program, recruitment, and income (average income \$52,387.)

Rick thanked Deacon for his very thorough presentation, and for all the work he and his staff do for this program. Rick pointed out that this program offers a tremendous advantage for someone wanting to run their own business. He asked the stakeholders to get the word out on this great opportunity.

Bernice Davis – Executive Director's Report:

- SRC Annual Report is due on December 31. Bernice thanked everyone who has committed to actively assisting with this report, and pointed out that participation is even more significant as CBVI has two other pertinent projects going on at this time. The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) is one, which we'll be partnering with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and other stakeholders in order to fulfill obligation for the CSNA. Also received our 2018 Monitoring Report from the federal government. In 2018 we had a long awaited federal audit, and the report finally came in a few days ago. The Commission's team has a lot of work to do to come up with a draft response. Part of the draft is a corrective action plan, which will entail different task forces and ideas, commitments, recommendations, and strategies on how to correct anything we were sited on. The good news is that there were no surprises in the report, and we did very well. However, we do have a lot of work to do with our internal controls. Every year we get better with policies & procedures; always trying to keep up to date. Although CBVI used to have its own policy and procedure unit, that disbanded many years ago. We have now dedicated one staff person who is taking a lead on P&Ps to ensure we are up to date; making things easier for operation and consistency.
- Order of Selection: as previously discussed, is something we want to stay away from. Two years ago 47% of the VR agencies across the US were in Order of Selection; now it has bumped up to 51%. Bernice noted that when she has gone to the national conferences and spoken to the different directors/administrators who are in Order of Selection, the biggest common denominator is dependence on re-allotment dollars from the federal government. In addition to a federal grant that all of the VR agencies get, at the end of the fiscal year there's re-allotment dollars that can be requested; however, it's not a guarantee; you can get less, what you asked for, or nothing at all. So if you've incorporated these re-allotment dollars in your budget to run your programs, and the

federal government gives you less than you need or nothing, you have a problem. CBVI has gotten too close to the edge of dipping into re-allotment dollars. Our budget has remained flat over the past 5-7 years, but at the same time we obviously have programs, contracts to meet the needs of the consumers that all cost money. Bernice noted that staff are being reminded to ask for things in a fiscally, reasonable, healthy, thoughtful way. If a consumer needs something - absolutely, we're here to meet the consumers' needs. However, we have to be thoughtful and not just sign off on authorizations without the proper justification and conversation with the consumer and supervisors. Need to change the culture; there's not a bottomless pit of money; we have to move back to the middle in terms of being fiscally healthy. Going to an Order of Selection would mean prioritizing services.

- We have had a lot of success with beefing up our internship program; part of this has come from the Governor actually creating some paid internships. We now have interns across disciplines: psychology, social worker, fiscal, O&M, education. It's a win/win situation.
- CBVI has been very good at building opportunities to collaborate with our stakeholders and the outside community; we want to increase that. Very important now more than ever; budgets are not keeping up with inflation; meeting consumer needs is more difficult.
- Feedback from VR counselors: Many have expressed they feel they're not counseling enough; time has been limited due to the federal obligations in terms of paperwork; additional documentation and forms to be filled out. In an attempt to support the counselors and afford them more time to counsel, over the last 8 months we've beefed up supports by adding some vocational assistant positions. Will also be bringing on someone to help with post-exit surveys, which has taken up the time of the counselors, managers, and supervisors. Also brought on a couple of social work trainees – 2 interns coming on. Hopeful to have the social workers be a resource to the consumers, as well as to the counselors; the social worker can be helpful with housing and domestic issues. In addition, Bernice has asked Human Resources to take a look at re-creating a small, seniors volunteer program.
- Recent positions posted/added: 1) A Quality Assurance Coordinator – this person will help us have a more routine oversight regarding internal controls. Currently, internal controls are dispersed through the regions and different units; the Agency used to have a QAC; however, the position was never backfilled. 2) Two Assistant Division Director positions have also been posted; these will fall under the Executive Director in order to help manage, providing the proper attention and oversight, creativity, and feedback to every single one of the units at the Commission. There used to be an actual level between the Executive Management Team, and the Executive Director; very happy this administration actually sees the benefit; this will definitely trickle down to the supervisors, as well as consumers. 3) A part-time community outreach liaison was hired (Krystle Allen); she is responsible for going out to various events/agencies to educate people about the Commission and the services we provide; sets up resource tables at

different events as well. If you have anything upcoming, or even not yours, something CBVI would be good to be represented at, please send Pam Gaston an email.

- Looking at additional training for staff. A staff survey was recently conducted; over 124 staff responded, close to 50%. Staff wanting us to do well in terms of internal controls; looking for consistency and how to improve consumer services. Will tally up survey info and take some action with it.

Amanda Gerson, Vocational Rehabilitation Update:

- 2018 Federal Monitoring Report: Working on our Plan of Correction. Nothing sited was a surprise. There are definite staff training issues to work on. Some issues are a result of staff leaving/retirements, and taking institutional knowledge with them. Training on policies will need to be done. Amanda noted that she will be working with Staff Development in completing a follow-up survey in order to prioritize the order of training on VR topics. Will also be recording trainings, webinar style, with our video camera, so when we get a new staff member, or someone forgets what the policy is, a supervisor can have them watch the webinar.
- NJ Administrative Code 10:95: Work continues with completing the update. Amanda has been working with a DHS Legal Specialist, who is now writing the text that explains to the public why we are changing the code. Expect to be published by the end of October, or early November. Shortly after, will be posted for comment; will then review and respond. The process will then be completed and we'll have a new code! Following the completion, Amanda noted she will then create a comprehensive P&P manual.
- Vocational assistants are being hired to handle the statewide post exit follow up; the outreach to consumers who have exited the system to verify employment and wages, and to find out if they've gotten any education since they left the program. This was something supervisors were doing; having them do it was just not working. It was time consuming, inconsistencies in the way the data was being inputted into the system. The Vocational Assistants will do that outreach and report directly to Kevin Harris, who is our program compliance and reporting person. Supervisors and managers are happy about this change; looking forward to freeing up their time for supervising, ensuring authorizations are done well, and cases managed well.
- CSNA: looking to capitalize on existing gatherings, instead of one big statewide meeting this time. Will be holding a couple of focus groups at the upcoming NFB Conference in November. Also working to identify groups that are a little younger and vocational focused to get feedback from them. Amanda noted that the managers have reinstated the consumer advisory boards in the local areas, so that's another focus group we'll be bringing together. Will be talking to other stakeholders and members of the community to identify other organizations that may have gatherings that would afford us 30-60 minutes to get targeted feedback. Amanda noted she would welcome suggestions from any of the members on existing, standing organizations or gatherings that she should reach out to, who might be willing to have a focus group. In addition, will be putting out

surveys, which will also be available at the NFB convention. Amanda noted that in addition to general VR, the two targeted groups that we'd like to reach out to with a couple of customized questions are the deaf blind community and our transition age students/parents. Kathleen suggested a local NJ nonprofit organization called the Deaf Blind League of NJ (DBL NJ.org); they meet once a month at the Edison Public Library – contact is Kevin Munn, President.

Amanda asked that if anyone is interested in potentially co-facilitating a focus group, let her know. She explained that in the past we've always had the SRC participate in the process because people may not feel as comfortable telling their issues to CBVI staff. Rick offered to assist at the upcoming NFB conference.

- Amanda reported that we submitted our annual report with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) at the end of September. That report is separate from our quarterly report, which is more on our performance piece; the annual report (ETA 9169) talks about how many consumers we've served over the year, training in career services, expenditures, and the cost per consumer.
- This past year, unfortunately, we did not have the best turnout for our summer programs; the 101 Program was canceled and Session 2 of the Work Skills Prep Program did not have enough confirmed/interested students to hold a session. So, for next summer, we decided to hold our open house in September, as opposed to Jan/Feb. This way we'd have more time to follow up on applications, and do a second push if needed for referrals. 15 people attended the open house for each of the 2 programs; great start. Counselors now have info packets and will be meeting with the students who expressed an interest in applying to the program to go over the information; applications will be due on Dec 1.
- Staffing Update: A third deaf blind counselor joined the CBVI team - Chris Shannon; working out of Newark. Grace DeLeo now covering the Freehold counties. Patrick Pallies covering Cherry Hill. We now have 2 staff members who are deaf; we've been finding it a challenge to get interpreters when needed. So approval has been given and we've posted for 1 FT and 1 PT CBVI interpreter.

Sub Committees:

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

The SRC Annual Report sub-committee: Amanda commented on the Annual Report's shift to a different format a few years back, in which it has been more story focused/narrative; showing great things the Commission does and the lives we impact. This year, although it will keep that same focus, it will be presented in a more informal format; this year's report will be developed into a wall calendar – top part being the information; i.e. success stories, statistics; bottom portion a calendar. The narrative version of the report will still be submitted to Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), and the Governor and Commissioner in December. After that,

we'll take the information and turn it into a community information document (calendar) for stakeholders, consumers, and legislators, to see our programs and the progress of our consumers. Amanda noted that she is waiting for nominations from staff for this year's success stories. Jon, Ida, and Lia have volunteered to assist in the process of asking consumers some questions and then writing up a short narrative to feature their success story. Amanda is also working on getting the blurbs of the different programs updated by the managers and coordinators. The goal is to have all the text written by Nov 1, so we can do our internal edits and reviews and get the report to DHS for them to review/edit before Thanksgiving.

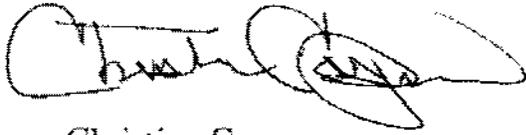
Adjournment

Rick thanked everyone for attending today's meeting.

Jonathan Goodman made a motion to adjourn the meeting; this motion was seconded; all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for December 6.

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant