

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

Meeting Minutes – December 7, 2018
Joseph Kohn Training Center - 130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

Voting Members Present: Gary Altman, Rick Fox, Jonathan Goodman, Susan Head, Charles McKenna, Kelly Reymann, William Robinson, Evangelia Stone, Kris Tucker

Present (pending appointments): Alice Eaddy, Clarke King, John Tkacz

Absent: Pamela Aasen, Ida Behrini, Bernice Davis, Jennifer Eckelmann, Lisa Killion-Smith, Damian Petino

Ex Officio Present: Amanda Gerson, Danielle Licari-Scorzelli

Staff/Members of Public Present: J. Oursler, C. Bazan, C. Socha, S. Herrick, A. Parker, S. Arnold, A. Durante, K. Harris, C. Kiene, E. Kowalec

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 welcomed and thanked everyone for attending today's meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes & 2019 SRC Meeting Schedule

A motion was made by Evangelia Stone, and seconded by Jonathan Goodman, to approve the meeting minutes of October 5, 2018; all were in favor; the minutes were approved.

Federal & State Update – Dr. Bernice Davis:

Amanda Gerson read the following report in Dr. Davis's absence:

I regret not being able to join the SRC today due to a long-standing family obligation, but look forward to joining you in February.

- CBVI is back to a three manager structure. Diana Cortez, most recently an Independent Living Supervisor, is now the manager of the Southern Service Center in Cherry Hill; Dr. Aaliyah Dent, formerly a Program Development Specialist and supervisor of Social Work at Greystone Psychiatric Hospital, is now the manager of the Northern Service Center. I would like to thank Manager John Reiff for his dedication and contributions in keeping the Central and Northern Service Centers up to par in their delivery of important consumer services over the past three years. The managers have been invited to attend February's SRC meeting to introduce themselves and discuss current initiatives in their respective units.
- DHS has commenced the interviewing process for three Director vacancies within their Department, inclusive of CBVI. I do not have any further information at this time, but will keep the Chair posted.

- DHS State Budget Listening Session occurred on December 5. Most concerns were voiced by aging parents with disabled children asking for more services, as well as requests for increased funding for childcare centers and direct service specialist. A few written testimonies were sent regarding CBVI's need to maintain funding for statewide education services, and maintaining state match for our federal match. In regard to the federal budget, while many federal agencies could possibly shut down if Congress and the President cannot agree on a new budget by December 21, 2018, the Vocational Rehabilitation program will not be effected.
- I recently attended an ASPIRE facilitators training, which was successfully developed and run by Susan Vanino, VR Counselor, and Elizabeth Deshields, our Independent Living Coordinator.
- BENJ will participate in a DHS pilot program that will involve barcoding all state equipment for better inventory accountability.
- The Acting Director, Independent Living Coordinator, and Director of Blindness Education are planning to visit a handful of Orientation & Mobility, and Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired certification programs.
- CBVI will be giving identified consumers an opportunity to become more efficient in their keyboarding skills with an itinerant training program in early 2019.
- Any certified O&M Specialist, Home Instructor, Teacher of the Blind, or driver may submit their resumes to HR for consideration, as we have an open and ongoing search due to local and national shortages.
- The annual Season of Service initiative is taking place in each of our service centers, as a way of giving back to the community by donating items needed to positively impact upon the lives of NJ's most vulnerable.

I wish everyone a warm and joyous holiday season, filled with the gifts of love, friendship, and good health. All the best to you and your families for the New Year! Bernice

Vocational Rehabilitation Update, by Amanda Gerson:

- Amanda and the Acting Executive Director attended the joint CSAVR and NCSAB conferences in November. This is a bi-annual conference, bringing together all VR administrators from around the country, as well as representatives from the technical assistance centers, relative vendors, and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Amanda commented that it is a great opportunity to get together and share best practices, see emerging programs from across the country, and get additional feedback and updates from RSA. Amanda commented that it was an honor for her to present on CBVI's EDGE 2 Program at this conference; this program is for undergraduate college students to help them adjust and be successful in college, while preparing for careers after graduation.

- Amanda provided an update on the Agency's transition programs:
 - EDGE 1 & 2 programs are at capacity and flourishing. Reviewing the ability to increase the EDGE 1 cap for next quarter, so we can accept all high school students who are interested in participating.
 - The referral process began in November for Work Skills Prep and College Prep, The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) programs. There will be an open-house scheduled for January so that students and families can make informed decisions about whether or not they choose to apply. Changes are being made to the college prep program this year; the orientation program component will be expanded, to invite more students looking at pursuing college; they may not necessarily be sure that college is right for them, but they want the experience; they want to learn more, or may need a little more support to be successful. The career and college exploration and readiness activities will be increased. Will continue to partner with one of the professors at the college, who taught a writing workshop last year. Will also explore bringing in someone to do in-depth, hands-on career exploration activities; may be partnering with the Masters and Counseling Program at TCNJ.
- The Business Relations Unit (BRU) continues to expand connections and outreach. Amanda shared some of the recent successes and relationships that have been developed by the BRU.
- Amanda noted that Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is awaiting feedback from RSA regarding the audit performed in August/September. Also, with the new managers in place, plans are in place for renewed focus on case reviews and making sure data documentation and integrity is where it needs to be.

Rick asked if there are any plans for providing support to graduates faced with looking for a job. Amanda noted that there are no formal programs for those that have recently graduated; however, the development of EDGE 2 does address issues graduates face. At the end of the four years, the expectation is that these students have an increased focus on making sure their resume is perfected and they are looking for work experiences; interview skills are worked on throughout the program; they are encouraged and facilitated to find internship opportunities, so they are ready and have all the skills they need when they graduate. In addition, the BRU is working to put an emphasis on identifying opportunities for college students/graduates. Amanda noted that she would welcome any additional ideas on how the Agency can best support recent college graduates to facilitate their transition from a post-secondary setting to work.

Rick asked of any new developments in customized employment, working with people with multiple disabilities. Amanda noted that Kelly and TCNJ recently did another "intro to blindness" for Community Options, focused on educating basic blindness skills; working with individuals who are blind, as well as person centered planning and job development approach from a more customized employment discovery model. We've found this has been very successful and appreciated in the past; it helps them work better with our consumers who have the most significant disabilities. That said, it is not a sustainable model for us to do this when requested, particularly with the high turnover in supported employment agencies. The plan is to put out a Request For Information (RFI) to supported employment agencies, as well as any stakeholder that wants to provide feedback on how we can improve our supported employment services; how we can better support the providers in the community. Amanda reported on ideas being explored, which include working with a smaller group of supported employment providers, so we can provide technical assistance and support; form closer working relationships; facilitate smoother services and ultimately have better outcomes. In addition, we are looking at our current fee schedule, recognizing the general rate may not be sufficient. We are exploring either increasing our supported employment rate for job development and job placement and coaching, or moving to a milestone or hybrid model, where we're paying for outcomes at different steps along the way, as opposed to just

a fee for service hourly rate. Once that is completed we will bring together a committee of counselors, supervisors, managers, and TCNJ to take that information and draft a Request For Proposal or just a notice of funding availability; we'll be working with the Department to identify what type of contracting request proposal process we are going to use. This would renew and create a system that works best for CBVI and the consumers we serve. Rick requested a copy of the RFI once it is completed.

Susan Head asked if the BRU connects with supported employment and whether or not there is a process when jobs are identified, to match students with those opportunities. Amanda commented that we have recognized that the supported employment agencies are a great partner for our BRU, and in the new year we will be sending an introduction letter, and some of our new brochures, to all of our supported employment providers to let them know that CBVI can provide training, technical assistance, whatever they need to make them feel more secure. Amanda explained that the BRU develops relationships with businesses, providing high level technical assistance and education. If a business is interested, we are able to work with them to identify candidates for available jobs. However, that's not the BRU's first task, and it's not the federal mandate. The federal mandate is to serve the business. At the end of the day, the whole goal is to open doors, but the BRU is not directly job developing; not responsible for placement. The VR counselors and consumers work with the BRU to find out if they are a good match for opportunities that arise. The BRU works with the businesses, and if there is a supported employment consumer, they would need the job coaching, and the BRU works collaboratively to make sure everyone has the supports they need. Amanda noted that this is still an ongoing and developing process that we are fine-tuning; making additional connections. The hope is that when we move to whatever our new supported employment services system is, we'll work with a smaller group of vendors and can then have a more collaborative relationship between general VR services, our BRU, and the supported employment vendors.

Rick thanked Amanda for her wide-range update.

Old/New Business:

Kris Tucker provided an updated on Access Link's (AL) services (NJ Transit and Para-Transit statewide service). AL offers origin to destination transportation for customers who have disabilities. In October, new initiatives began to enhance the customer experience; i.e. reservations, website enhancement, etc.. Kris noted there are 164 current customers who are helping test the website, before releasing to the over 48,000 people who are registered to use these services. She explained that a customer can go on-line to make a reservation, monitor their reservation, and make changes to their account. Another feature that has been developed, Easy Wallet, which is an electronic fare option. So far overall testing is going well; customers have been reserving hundreds of rides with the new system. Kris noted that they are testing screen readers, and addressing issues and holding the vendor accountable for any problems. Also being developed and tested internally is an interactive voice response system, which will be for customers who don't have computer access, only access to a phone. Also, push notifications – customers will be able to receive texts on the status of their ride. Also, AL has reduced the pick-up time window by 10 minutes. Kris explained some of the new features in more detail, as she answered questions from the SRC members. Rick asked if he could get involved with the on-line testing; Kris welcomed his offer. Alice questioned whether or not any of the testers are deaf/blind. Kris wasn't sure if there was anyone with a dual sensory loss. Alice noted that the internet access portion with the form is not really accessible for this population. Kris noted that with the on-line updates to the website, it's pretty user friendly now. Kris offered for Alice to try it out; she will provide her with the links.

Sub-Committee

Annual Report – Amanda, Ida, Jennifer, Kelly, and Pat

Amanda reported that the 2018 annual SRC report is almost completed; two rounds of edits have been done so far. It will then be submitted to CBVI's administrative office for proofing, and then on to the Department of Human Services and RSA by the deadline - December 30. Kept last year's format this year, which is to use spotlight stories from consumers of all programs, to highlight the great things being done. Rick asked about the VR 26/employment numbers. Amanda reviewed 2018: 196 total employment outcomes (191 previous year). Amanda pointed out the challenges in obtaining the necessary information for the report on maintaining employment at 6-month and 1-year after exit intervals. This is an evolving challenge, not unique to the other workforce programs and certainly not unique to New Jersey. Working with a company called Mathematica; they have a grant to help VR agencies improve their quality assurance and performance evaluations. Working to expand our current computer system to be able to give counselors, supervisors, and managers regular feedback on performance, as well as help the agency administration look at how we're doing.

Amanda welcomed and introduced the Rutgers VR counseling group, who conducted a soft-skills focus group during the second half of this meeting.

The 2019 meeting dates are: Feb 1, April 5, June 7, October 4, December 6, 2019

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant