

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

Meeting Minutes – December 9, 2022 (virtual meeting)

Voting Members Present: Pamela Aasen, Ida Behreini, Vito DeSantis, Clarke King, Kathleen Spata, Evangelia Stone, Lauren Weishaar, Ronda Williams, Wanda Williford

Members Awaiting Appointment Present: Steven McCoy, Gwen Orlowski, James Good, Amanda Philp

Absent: Don Campbell, John O’Connell, Alice Eaddy

Ex Officio Present: Dr. Bernice Davis, Kathleen Donnellon, John Tkacz

CBVI Staff: Pat McKenna, Amanda Gerson, Selina Gooden

Members of Public Present: Susan Head, Elisa Cohen, Janna Sheiman, Haley Carney

Lia Stone, SRC Chairperson, welcomed everyone, calling the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. Lia announced 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.

Lia reminded everyone to introduce themselves prior to speaking; to keep their camera on if they are able to; and to speak as clearly as possible.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the October 7, 2022, meeting were reviewed. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Vito DeSantis and seconded by Wanda Williford; all were in favor. These meeting minutes will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

2023 Meeting Dates:

Proposed meeting dates for 2023 are Feb 3, Jun 9, Oct 6, & Dec 1

Proposed Rain dates for 2023 are Feb 10, Jun 16, Oct 13, Dec 8

A motion to approve the meeting dates as read was made by Wanda Williford and seconded by Ida Behreini; all were in favor.

The meeting format for 2023 was discussed and the option of moving back to in-person meetings at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) in New Brunswick was put forward. Comments were made suggesting a hybrid in-person meeting style would be beneficial for 2023, having the face-to-face meeting along with an option for virtual connection. Pat McKenna was invited to explain the capabilities for hosting a hybrid style meeting at the JKTC and he shared that the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired's (CBVI) Chief of Information Technology (IT) is already looking into options for hosting a hybrid meeting there. The June meeting was then proposed as a good time to start these, however the SRC members suggested that February should be enough time to have a workable solution. Vito DeSantis made a motion to begin holding hybrid meetings on Feb 3rd at JKTC or use the Law Center in New Brunswick for the Feb 3rd meeting since this location already has hybrid capabilities in place. Ronda Williams seconded the motion. This motion was passed. Pat McKenna will be in contact with Lia Stone and Vito DeSantis regarding the technology concepts to host hybrid SRC meetings starting in February, 2023.

Old/New Business

Elections for Chairperson and Vice Chairperson

Lia Stone acknowledged that Vito DeSantis was the only nomination received for Chairperson. Pat McKenna and Amanda Gerson received no additional nominations.

All were then reminded that only members who were appointed can be nominated for Chair or Vice Chair; only appointed members can vote for the Chair and Vice Chairperson.

Lia asked if there were any nominations from the floor; there were none. Wanda Williford moved that all nominations cease and that Vito DeSantis be appointed by acclamation; Ronda Williams seconded that motion; all were in favor. Vito DeSantis was appointed and thanked the SRC for their confidence in him.

Lia Stone acknowledged that a nomination for Vice Chair was received, but the person withdrew for personal reasons. Lia asked if there were any nominations from the floor.

Ida Behreini nominated herself. There were no other nominations made. Vito DeSantis moved that all nominations cease and that Ida Behreini be appointed by acclamation. Wanda Williford seconded that motion; all were in favor. Ida Behreini was appointed and thanked the SRC for their confidence in her.

Subcommittees:

Members discussed composition and the role of each subcommittee.

Amanda Gerson shared a few additional points regarding subcommittees. Subcommittees are not a required component of the SRC, but they are beneficial for helping the SRC execute its required duties. SRC has flexibility to decide if the SRC even has sub committees, how they are organized, whether or not all SRC members should be required to be on at least one subcommittee, etc. The SRC can consider these points when discussing how to be structured moving forward.

Amanda briefly explained the role and function of the subcommittees:

- **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Committee:** Chaired by Vito DeSantis. Tasked with making decisions and guiding the different CSNA activities, required by RSA, for the CBVI agency to do.
- **Business Engagement Committee:** Chair vacant since March, 2022. Historically, this committee has given ideas, and requested information, from CBVI's Business Relations Unit. This committee, if kept, would benefit from a hearty discussion from the SRC members on what the role, purpose, and goals of this committee should be.
- **Policy and Procedure Committee:** Chaired by Ida Behreini. When CBVI is doing major updates with their policies, this will be shared with this committee for review, feedback, ask questions, and give suggestions for consideration by CBVI.
- **SRC Annual Report Committee:** Chaired by Katie Donnellon. This committee reviews the success stories in the report, making sure they are well written and portray the accomplishments and successes of clients and staff. Opportunities exist for this committee to be more involved in different aspects of the report.
- **Quality Assurance Committee:** Chaired by Clarke King

Vito DeSantis made known that he was aware of someone who may be available to serve as the Business Engagement Committee Chair. He will follow up with that person to see if they are still interested.

Additional Committees: The SRC has had a committee on pre-employment transition services and perhaps this or any other interest areas could be a basis for an ad hoc committee or subcommittee.

At the next SRC Meeting, the following will be decided on:

1. Determine which committees should be active.
2. Should all SRC Members be required to sit on a committee.
3. Decide on the role/purpose/goals of each committee.
4. Produce complete description of what is involved for each committee.

SRC Meeting Format:

Amanda Gerson made a suggestion of updating the SRC meeting format, similar to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services' (DVRS) SRC meetings. Morning meetings with Executive Director's report, a lunch meeting as sub committees, and then reconvening after lunch to complete the SRC meeting. An additional summer meeting could be added, closed to the public, which could be to discuss SRC goals, etc. Vito DeSantis liked the idea and was open to the SRC considering it for the future.

2022 SRC Goals were reviewed to see if they were achieved, and to decide if there is a measurable that should be added to future goals. In 2022 the SRC will work/assist with CBVI:

1. to improve competitive integrated employment outcomes across all consumer groups being served.
2. as they transition back to in-person services.
3. towards greater interface with the local one-stop job centers.
4. to enhance opportunities for consumers to attend apprenticeship programs in different fields.
5. to increase the availability of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to consumers between the ages of 25-54.

Gwen Orlowski recommended for 2023 to add the goal of incorporating substantive presentations in the Quarterly SRC meetings, to educate the SRC, as well as having on-board training for new SRC members.

2023 SRC Goals and Priorities.

1. The SRC will meet four times as well as continue ongoing support to foster CBVI's goals. SRC members will continue to participate, as appropriate, in public forums and agency programs for the benefit of consumers.
2. The SRC will work with CBVI to enhance and improve competitive integrated employment outcomes across all VR consumer groups being served,
 - a. by assisting the Commission in identifying and partnering with apprenticeship programs for consumers;
 - b. by assisting the Commission in enhancing partnerships with the local One-Stops and larger workforce system.
3. The SRC will work with CBVI to identify topical presentations that can be presented at each SRC Meeting related to agency performance and compliance.
4. The SRC will work with CBVI to identify, develop, and provide an on-boarding training for new SRC Members to ensure all members understand the scope and role of SRC membership and the VR program.

5. The SRC will enhance and operationalize the role of the subcommittees to align its focus with the core requirements of the SRC, the SRC Bylaws, Federal Regulations, and the VR program.

Wanda Williford made a motion to accept the 2023 goals as outlined and discussed; Vito DeSantis seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Dr. Bernice Davis – Executive Director’s Report

Dr. Davis began with congratulations to Vito DeSantis as SRC Chair elect, and Ida Behreini as SRC Vice-Chair elect. She also thanked and congratulated Lia Stone on her success and the accomplishments CBVI and the SRC were able to achieve while Lia served as the SRC Chair.

Dr. Davis noted that it is budget season at the DHS. CBVI has two priorities & requests: Braille books – CBVI usually uses up the budget pretty quickly; want to be sure the Agency is in good shape as more requests for Braille books are received, so CBVI can meet those needs in a timely way. Recruitment for 2 specialty professions – Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) and Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Specialists. Nationally there is a shortage of TVIs and O&M Specialists. Special commendation was given to the CBVI staff; despite the shortage of staff due to retirements, the Commission has been able to meet all of the consumer’s needs through teamwork. CBVI is asking for monies to apply to recruitment efforts. Currently developing a recruitment campaign with DHS, where there will be ads, brochures, and a social media campaign for TVIs and O&M Specialists.

Additional driver aide positions are needed; they are pivotal in transporting employees who are blind, deaf blind, and visually impaired to consumers, so that they can get needed services.

CBVI has Low Vision panelists that help get eye screenings done for consumers. Looking to increase the compensation for the Low Vision panelists, and eye screening doctors, who go out into the communities to serve low income or rural communities.

Dr. Davis acknowledged that she is getting toward the end of her tenure as the President of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), which will be on December 31. She had the privilege of hosting the Fall Conference that happened in October 2022 and provided a few highlights from the conference.

- Recruitment and retention of staff, particularly VR Counselors, is a challenge nationally, but not with CBVI.
- States are being challenged with spending Federal monies that are given to VR Agencies. However, CBVI, under Pat McKenna, Amanda Gerson and her staff, were very creative in spending those funds towards VR programs. CBVI was able to

request re-allotment monies, requesting \$1.5million in extra monies from the Federal Government, and was approved for it. CBVI will be using those funds for building the VR Program, and toward a new case management system planned to go live by the end of next year. The overall health of the VR budget is great.

- **Business Engagement:** looking for ways to revamp and interface with private industries and employers. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is looking at general business fiscal issues, and looking to expand the target audience of their Spring Conference.

Dr. Davis reported on the Randolph Sheppard program challenges. 70% of Randolph Sheppard operators are either not back in business, or only making 30% of what was made pre-pandemic. Discussions on the national level, and in CBVI, on how to invigorate and recruit the program, have been held with very exciting proposals coming from them.

Dr. Davis then fielded questions and comments from the SRC Members.

- Regarding the Federal Funding, Gwen Orłowski mentioned that she would like to know in advance when CBVI might be considering giving monies back, due to not being able to spend it. She felt the SRC would like to give creative ideas on ways to use the funding. Gwen also inquired as to whether CBVI had to give any funds back. Dr. Davis & Amanda Gerson acknowledged that \$90,000 was given back from supported employment services. Due to some requirements, CBVI struggled with using those allotted monies. The strategy for the Supported Employment Services has been revamped and updates are expected for the February 2023 Quarterly meeting.

Pat McKenna, Assistant Division Director - Vocational Rehabilitation Update

Pat thanked the SRC for their feedback, comments, energy and enthusiasm at this meeting, which he noted helps in assisting CBVI accomplish their work. He reminded the SRC of the earlier comments regarding financial spending, and made a suggestion about forming another subcommittee regarding transition services. This could be considered and discussed at the February 3 meeting.

JKTC Updates:

JKTC had a couple of graduations recently, one was held on December 2. The independent apartment is again going to be utilized and two students are on track to use it at the beginning of 2023. Over the past few months, nine students have completed their community work experience opportunities, and a tenth student is ready to start their community work based experience on December 13, 2022. December 16 will be a virtual holiday party; all of the students who participated at JKTC throughout 2022 are invited.

Efforts continue to be made in order to fill the vacant employment positions for Orientation & Mobility Specialists. The JKTC is currently receiving assistance from other Commission offices, so that quality services continue to be provided.

Business Enterprise of New Jersey (BENJ) Updates:

The ServSafe Training, scheduled for December, was cancelled last minute. Currently looking for an organization to accommodate the needs of CBVI's population.

BENJ is planning to have an end of the year meeting on Dec 14 to cover program updates and provide opportunities for licensed managers to connect with one another.

The State Licensing Agency (SLA), The Commission, and the elected committee is developing upward mobility trainings for the managers. Training will cover operating a vending facility, interviewing skills, and best practices for financial management of operating a business.

Regarding new locations for BENJ, CBVI is looking into additional opportunities that could become BENJ locations. Pat McKenna is looking into sectors that are not government facilities. The Commission will also schedule trainings to equip field reps and managers with the skills to not only identify these types of potential BENJ locations, but to begin the conversations with them.

CBVI is also looking to develop internship opportunities for transition students at BENJ locations. There are now 12 managers that have expressed interest in providing this opportunity. The mechanism and logistics for this is now being worked on.

Amanda Gerson, Vocational Rehabilitation Coordinator - Update

Business Relations Unit (BRU):

The Business Relations Unit welcomed a new Business Relations Specialist, Brianna Murray, who previously worked with CBVI's EDGE program, and administered a similar program in Virginia. She has experience with job development, work-based learning experience development, and internship development. Ms. Murray is currently working on creating a database of internship opportunities geared towards students with disabilities and general internship opportunities. She is also working collaboratively with the JKTC to help enhance the work experience internship program.

The BRU celebrated National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October. CBVI:

- held a series of workshops that included a panel of speakers from CBVI that spoke about careers in the blindness field; well attended and received.
- had speakers come in from the local Society for Human Resources Managers (SHRM) to discuss the topics of disclosure and the accommodations process.
- held a mock interview event, speed dating style, with employers and consumers. The event was successful.

Transition Services:

The Academy for Career Exploration (ACE) Program was held. At these meetings, different interest areas and informational interviews & strategies were discussed. Two blind professionals were also brought in from the field to talk about their areas of employment and their journey.

CBVI is currently rebranding some transition programs and are always looking to improve upon and grow the programs being offered.

- College Prep Program is now the SUCCESS Program, Students Understanding College & Career expectations for Excellence in School and Society.
- Work Skills Prep is now the STEPS Program, Successful Transition Experiences Preparing Students. This is for students eligible for Division of Developmental Disability (DDD) and supported employment and CBVI services.
- A new program has been developed for a broader student target audience and with a focus on career explorations and career pathways, but still includes the full range of pre-employment services. This program is a modification of the Work Skills Program.
- LIFE 101 summer program at JKTC is now an acronym, Learning and Independence for Future Employment.
- EDGE program, Employment Development Guidance and Engagement, will now be administered by the ARC of Ocean County, starting in January 2023.
- Launching a new workshop series, SMILE, Starting My Independent Living Experience; administered by CBVI's transition counselors, will be held during the evening or weekends, for students who do not want to join or who do not have the time to join the larger programs.

New Programs being developed:

- CYBER.ORG: Weekend program focused on coding, robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Cybersecurity
Created specifically with accessibility in mind for blind and visually impaired people.

- A Fellowship Program with Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey will be launched in 2023. It will be a peer mentorship program that will pair college students with seniors. The program focus will be on peer support, mentor, self-advocacy, self-concept as a person with a visual impairment, soft skills, communication, etc.

It is anticipated that all student programs will be in-person programs, but with some hybrid components.

CBVI is doing more open-house and resource events. Recently had 2 open-house information sessions; one on transition services and the other on college services. Currently, in the planning phases of a resource fair, to be held in April, 2023. Ms. Gerson will reach out to a few SRC Members to encourage assistance with this event.

SRC Member Reports

Members were reminded that updates (bullet points) are to be e-mailed to Christine Cooper prior to, or immediately following, each meeting, and will be included in the meeting minutes.

The following update was received from Ronda Williams:

NJ Transit Access Link

We do acknowledge there are concerns regarding our service delivery, particularly in our Region 5 area, which serves customers that are traveling in the following counties (Essex, Morris, Union, and Somerset counties).

Access Link On Time Performance (OTP)

The following are things we are doing to address and improve our current On Time Performance levels:

- We are looking to partner with other transportation services such as Uber, Lyft, VIA and Taxi services to off-set trips that may/will be potentially delayed. This would just be another option for our customers. Customers will have the option to opt out of this initiative.
- We're at the final stages of this initiative and will be marketing this initiative soon.
- As of now for updates regarding delays, we do encourage our customers to check the phone system, access link online, and subscribe to getting alerts.

Outreach Events

- We are looking for opportunities to reach out and connect with our customers who have visual impairments. If anyone has any events that we can attend to help people apply for

Access Link or help them understand new initiatives that are up and coming, please reach out to Ronda Williams rwilliams@njtransit.com and she can definitely connect you to the right person.

- **NJ Transit is actually hosting an NJ Accessibility Forum** on Thursday, December 15 from 1pm to 3pm. This forum will offer to the public the opportunity to make comments related to NJ Transit accessible services. Feel free to register and pass along the information.

Adjournment

Wanda Williford made a motion to adjourn today's meeting; Lauren Weishaar seconded the motion; all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 12:30pm.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for February 3, 2023.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bryan McClain

Bryan McClain

Executive Secretarial Assistant