

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

Meeting Minutes – October 1, 2021 (virtual meeting)

Voting Members Present: Pamela Aasen, Ida Behreini, Vito DeSantis, Alice Eaddy, Jonathan Goodman, Clarke King, William Robinson, Evangelia Stone

Members Present, Awaiting Appointment: Donald Campbell, John O’Connell, Charles Ouslander, Wanda Williford

Absent: Kathleen Donnellon, Bill Freeman, Sheryl Hutchison, Kathleen Spata, Ronda Williams

Ex Officio Present: Bernice Davis, John Tkacz

Staff/Members of Public Present: Amanda Gerson, Pat McKenna, Joan Harvey, Selina Gooden

Lia Stone, SRC Chairperson, welcomed members and guests, calling the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. She 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.

Ms. Stone encouraged everyone to actively participate in today’s meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes of June 4, 2021, were reviewed. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Vito DeSantis, and seconded by Alice Eaddy; all were in favor. These meeting minutes will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

Schedule of Meetings

Final meeting for 2021 is scheduled for December 3.

Proposed meeting dates for 2022: February 4, June 10, October 7 and December 9.

As there were no objections to the dates proposed, a motion was made by Vito DeSantis and seconded by Alice Eaddy to approve the 2022 meeting dates; all were in favor.

Dr. Bernice Davis – Executive Director’s Report

- Welcome to Pat McKenna, CBVI’s Assistant Division Director, and the most recent addition to CBVI’s Executive Management team. Pat’s primary focus is on enhancing CBVI’s Vocational Rehabilitation Program and service delivery; working closely with Amanda Gerson, as well as Susan Engstrom (JKTC Manager) and Deacon Truesdale (BENJ Manager). Dr. Davis commented that she is very happy to have Pat as part of the CBVI team, and very confident in the knowledge base that he brings to the Commission; looking forward to building on the successes already achieved, and the next phase of enhancements for CBVI.
- CBVI employees are currently in the office/field two days per week. The Agency has been providing services in the field since early/late spring. Requests from a consumer to remain receiving services in a virtual format is something that we try to accommodate.
- Kudos to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff, as well as the entire Agency staff, for their dedication and teamwork over the last 18 months.

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- Effective October 18, all staff are expected to be on site full-time. A lot of time has been spent on prepping for the in-office return; want to make sure that everyone has what they need with regard to protective equipment and feeling safe. There is a mandate now for State employees to be vaccinated or comply with weekly testing; at this time awaiting information around testing protocols.
- CBVI received the requested extra funding from the Federal Government for the VR Program. This money will help to sure us up for the new and improved case management system; expected to start up in 2022. CBVI's current system is extremely antiquated; looking forward to more inclusive and professional data reports.
- As President Elect for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), Dr. Davis noted that she is in the midst of putting together this year's (virtual) fall conference, which will take place December 6-10. Working on a 90-minute session on business employment and technology; always looking for innovative approaches to business deployment of technology. Also looking for successful entrepreneurs who would be willing to share their story on a national platform.
- Kudos to the entire VR unit – they have had much success with consumers getting employment throughout the pandemic.
- Three students, who are consumers of our Teachers of the Visually Impaired services, placed in a recent national braille competition. Congratulations to them and the CBVI TVIs.

Charles Pat McKenna - Assistant Division Director's Report

- Financial restoration and relief payments were sent out to the Randolph Sheppard operators; this money will help offset some of the losses endured, from lack of sales, throughout the pandemic. The re-opening has been a difficult process; locations are in a range of different buildings, run by different government entities; some are re-opening and some are not at this time; some have different standards and guidelines.
- JKTC has been undergoing a series of renovations, which are just about completed. The goal is for the Center to be functioning again, for a limited number of consumers, by month's end. Will be starting with a limited number of commuter students, as well as providing a virtual option for those potential participants for whom attending in person might not be an option at this time. Will be introducing more and more commuter students, as time passes. There's no timeline on having residents at this time. A looping system is now available in the conference rooms, which will make meetings more accessible for the hard of hearing.
- As caseworkers have returned to the field they are having to navigate a complicated landscape of COVID protocols. In addition to CBVI procedures they may also have to visit a school where they encounter additional or conflicting standards and procedures. Relying on after school and virtual meetings when and where possible.
- College Prep Experience - Work Skills program – Life 101 – EDGE: all continue virtually at this time; hoping to be able to introduce some in-person or a hybrid model of content down the road; dates to be determined.
- SSP and I Can Connect are allowing for in-person service with COVID screening assessments.

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Amanda Gerson – Vocational Rehabilitation Report

- To kick-off National Disability Employment Awareness month, the Business Relations Unit (BRU) is hosting a virtual career café with 2 businesses per week for 4 weeks. Representatives from these businesses will be coming on to talk about their company, the industry, and the type of employment opportunities they have. They will share information on how their company handles hiring people with disabilities. These are business partners that we've worked with before, and we are familiar with their practices and their commitment to hiring people with disabilities. The BRU is really excited about the event. Amanda commented that she thinks everyone can get something out of this event; spreading the word and hoping to have good attendance.
- Amanda reported on personnel changes in the BRU, and the effort to cross-train staff to ensure coverage.
- Kick-off meeting was held with the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) for the progressive employment project; this is the idea that everyone in the VR process is ready for some form of work experience and that early engagement helps to get buy-in, and lead to retention and success. Also, it is a big help for engaging businesses, and gives us the opportunity to form new relationships; really excited about this project; will be scheduling upcoming monthly calls with our team.
- Corrective Action Plan (CAP): everyone has done an amazing job. One finding during the audit was compliance in time and status - how long it takes folks to go from application to having eligibility determined. Just received confirmation we had two consecutive quarters of 90+ percent compliance; that is awesome; certainly looking to maintain that. Doing a lot of work around quality assurance and initiatives. As previously noted, the only items still outstanding are the ones that we're relying on other agencies/entities to provide information/feedback. Just received feedback from our last quarter CAP, which we'll review in the next few days.

SRC Members' Reports

Members were reminded to send their (bulleted) reports to Chris Cooper for inclusion in the meeting minutes.

The following reports were submitted:

John Tkacz (Representative for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services):

- DVRS is hosting a Virtual Disability Awareness Month Event (DEAM) on Oct. 28th from 1p-3pm. It will be a Virtual Job Fair with a Guest speaker and 15-20 employers who will meet with consumers in break-out rooms. Consumers will have the opportunity to learn about the employers and available jobs and can apply for employment. Additionally, consumers who had utilized services will be sharing about their experience with obtaining assistance and employment.
- There are 25 new hire VR counselor who will be completing a 3-day orientation mid-October.
- Summer Internship have come to a close. There were 15 Summer Internship Contracts awarded to community vendors all throughout the state, providing work based learning experiences. All internships were paid at or above minimum wage.

Kathleen Spata (Community Rehabilitation Program Provider): SSP-NJ has begun to offer in-person SSP support to the Deafblind consumers of CBVI. We have approximately 15 consumers and 15 SSPs authorized for in-person services. Some consumers have benefited from the virtual services, which we will continue to offer, but some have not due to the close-range and hands-on nature of the SSP service. Consumers are very grateful for the service to be offered in person again. Requests have begun to be submitted to the SSP-NJ program and we anticipate more to come!

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**Sheryl Hutchison, Deputy Executive Director for the State Employment and Training,
Commission (NJ SETC):**

New local WDB plans and regional plans:

- WIOA requires a new state plan every 4 years, with update/modification every 2 years. The NJ State Plan for WIOA was submitted to USDOL and USED and approved in June 2020.
- Local WDBs must also create local plans and regional plans – NJ has three regions (North, Central, South) - every 4 years, and then update/modify every 2 years.
- The SETC and NJDOL create guidance for these local and regional plans – the Local WDBs then submit their plans to SETC and NJDOL for review and feedback/approval.
- The Local WDBs will be asked to create new 4-year local and regional plans in the coming year, 2021/2022.
- The SETC and NJDOL partners are drafting guidance now; and asking partners to help tweak the existing guidance from 2016/2018 to ensure we align with new state priorities and new conditions, including the impacts of the COVID pandemic.
- We will include CBVI in this drafting process, to ensure inclusion and coordination. The discussions are just getting started and we will be working on the guidance throughout the Fall/early Winter.
- Any questions or ideas can be sent to Sheryl Hutchison at SETC for potential inclusion in the guidance/plan drafting process.

Pamela Aasen (Parent Training & Information Center Representative):

SPAN Workshops:

Parent Rights in Special Education

This workshop provides an overview of the rights and responsibilities of parents who have children with disabilities.

Thu, October 7, 2021

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM EDT

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/parent-rights-in-special-education-registration-169668138971?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

IEP 1: Essential Components

This workshop provides participants with a review of the essential components of an Individualized Education Plan.

Thu, October 14, 2021

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM EDT

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/iep-1-essential-components-registration-177460347677?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

IEP Part II: From Measurable Goals to Progress

This workshop provides strategies to create IEPs with measurable annual goals and objectives and required info about progress

Thu, October 21, 2021

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM EDT

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/iep-part-ii-from-measurable-goals-to-progress-registration-182926146027?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

For more events:

<https://spanadvocacy.org/news-archive/#event-calendar>

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Katie Donnellon, Vocational Rehab Counselor

- 1) A woman I met two years ago in July of 2019: At that time, she was a 23-year-old woman who suddenly lost a lot of vision leaving her legally blind. At first our meetings were filled with tears and despair. She felt there was nothing she could do. After much guidance and counseling I got her to agree to enroll in our Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC). JKTC is a residential facility that teaches life skills to people who are blind and visually impaired. With a lot of nerves and excitement she checked in to the center on March 9, 2020. We all know what happened next. Residence and staff were sent home on March 17. With time to adjust the CBVI staff rallied. Virtual lessons were offered and my consumer participated. She graduated from the program with a new attitude. In May of 2021 she requested funding assistance for enrolling into a Massage Therapy Certification Program which will lead to gainful employment. I am happy to report she is earning a 96% out of 100. She is so proud of herself for taking on this challenge and performing so well. Proving to herself that there is a lot she CAN do. Graduation is at the end of October at which time she will study for one month before taking the state exam. I went out to see her last week and she is making future plans once she is employed. She is even thinking about having her own apartment! The accommodations that enable her to perform the required tasks are: Computer with software for the blind (she purchased from Computers for the Blind), CCTV (loaner equipment), hand held digital magnifier (purchased by CBVI).
- 2) The person who is taking on the challenge of performing well despite her disability is a woman who came to me in January of 2021. Diagnosed with glaucoma she is visually impaired. She is a 32-year-old woman who is a US citizen. She got her medical degree in Pakistan. Since she has been in the United States she has applied for over 100 jobs. Unfortunately, her foreign degree is a barrier with employers. Her goal is to have an active employment lifestyle for her and her young daughter. CBVI is funding, Clinical Development & Regulatory Affairs certification program out of Mercer CCC. Not only is this a topical area of employment it is also in high demand. After earning this certificate, she will have the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform global clinical trials in pharmaceuticals and vaccines. This lines up with her medical background and interests. I speak with her at least once a week. She takes these courses seriously and is very grateful for the opportunity. Accommodations needed to perform required tasks: CCTV (loaner equipment), computer with software for the blind (loaner equipment).

Vito DeSantis (Representative of an Individual who is Blind):

RSA reference guide link:

<https://rsa.ed.gov/about/programs/vocational-rehabilitation-state-grants/vr-program-reference-guide>

Vito shared information on a system for the blind and visually impaired; a scanning and reading appliance; converts printed text to spoken text – the SARA system. Amanda provided a link in the chat for more information on this system. <https://saraworks.com/>

Ronda Williams (Business & Industry Representative):

VEHICLE CAPACITY INCREASE

- Access Link Vehicle capacity is now at 100%

SOCIAL MEDIA

- We still encourage customer/callers to follow us on TWITTER. Use the current technology: Access Link Online and the mobile app for reservations, cancellations and monitoring of vehicle arrival. Also encourage use of EZ-Wallet and WHERE'S MY RIDE.

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Access Link and Our Voter Registration Initiative

- Customer/Callers can now receive assistance with voter registration when calling into Access Link – if anyone need further information please contact Ronda Williams.

OUTREACH EVENTS

- We are looking for opportunities to reach out and connect with our customers who have visual impairments. If anyone have any events we can attend to help people apply for Access Link or help them understand new initiatives e have up and coming please reach out to Ronda Williams rwilliams@njtransit.com.

William Robinson (Business & Industry Representative):

- Demetia Summer
- Speaking on vaccine mandates
- Anthony Truck. EX NFL player
- Motivational speaker comparing life after the NFL to life after COVID
- Jessy Hartel and his team
- Speaking on new rules from GSA
- Conversations on micro Market Red Bull the energy drink

Sub-Committee Reports:

Business Engagement, Jon Goodman, Chairperson: No report given.

Policy and Procedure: Question of who will take over as Chairperson of this sub-committee; possibly Ida; need to confirm. Vito noted that he had offered to help out the members of this committee.

Quality Assurance, Clarke King, Chairperson: Clarke reported that QA reports are received from Dr. Whitmore and reviewed by this sub-committee. To date, reports all show that the Agency is in compliance, or close to compliance; will continue to monitor.

Annual Report: This sub-committee needs a new chairperson; volunteer is needed. Members were asked to think it over and reach out to Lia or Amanda as soon as possible.

SRC By-Laws, Vito DeSantis, Chairperson: reviewed the 2 areas addressed in the Department of Human Services (DHS) feedback. 1) Organizational relationships the Chair and Vice Chair could have; they provided a definition as to what a community provided rehabilitation organization is and essentially stated they can't both belong to that same organization. 2) Conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest of a family member. DHS echoed that of the Ethics Commission regarding relationships that should not dually serve on the SRC. Organizations that need to be represented are listed in the by-laws; this echoes state and federal regulations to ensures all the organizations that represent people who are blind, visually impaired, and/or deaf blind will be represented on the SRC.

Vito recommended the changes DHS wants to include be reviewed by SRC members, and a vote be taken either at the next meeting (December 3) or sometime before. Vito thanked those that provided assistance with the by-laws, especially members of the committee, Jonathan and Alice.

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The creation of a Statewide Needs Assessment Sub-Committee was discussed. Amanda explained that every 3 years an assessment is done to identify any gaps in services. Previously, SRC members volunteered during the assessment; creating a committee could help make this process go a lot smoother. Lia asked that members consider volunteering for this sub-committee, and contact Lia or Amanda prior to the December meeting.

Old/New Business

2022 Goals and Priorities: to be discussed and finalized at the next meeting.

Membership Update - Lia noted:

- there are quite a few people pending Governor approval. Dr. Davis reported there has been some shifting in the liaison office to the Governor, and the hope is that these appointments will get taken care of soon.
- Open seat on the SRC for a Community Rehab Provider, vacated by Pat McKenna. Reminder to members that any recommendations be emailed to Pat McKenna and Dr. Davis by 10/8/21.

William Robinson thanked Dr. Davis and the CBVI staff for the card sent to him as he was going through a recent family tragedy. William also thanked Pat McKenna and the JKTC management staff for holding a meeting this past week regarding the re-opening of the JKTC.

Adjournment

Alice Eaddy made a motion to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by William Robinson; all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned by 12 noon.

Lia thanked everyone for their participation at today's meeting.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for December 3, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Cooper

Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant