

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

Meeting Minutes – October 23, 2020 (virtual meeting)

Voting Members Present: Jennifer Armstrong-Ekelmann, Ida Behreini, Vito DeSantis, Alice Eaddy, Jonathan Goodman, Clarke King, Pat McKenna, William Robinson, Kathleen Spata, Evangelia Stone

Members Awaiting Appointment: Bill Freeman, Charles Ouslander

Absent: Pamela Aasen, Gary Altman, Kathleen Donnellon

Ex Officio Present: Bernice Davis, John Tkacz

Staff/Members of Public Present: Amanda Gerson, Michelle Whitmore, Donald Campbell, Wanda Williford

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

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes of September 18, 2020, were reviewed. There were no amendments, corrections, or additions recommended. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Jonathan Goodman, and seconded by Alice Eaddy; all were in favor. These meeting minutes will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

Dr. Bernice Davis – Executive Director’s Report:

Dr. Davis congratulated Lia once again as the SRC’s new Chairperson.

The Corrective Action Plan (CAP), which resulted from the RSA audit, is going extremely well. The Commission will be submitting completed items to the Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration by the end of this month. CBVI’s team has worked very hard, particularly on getting policies and procedures updated. The Commission’s Quality Assurance Coordinator and VR Coordinator have done a very good job putting together various quality assurance tools to assist in doing a better job in terms of eligibility timeframes.

As reported at the last meeting, the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) continues to provide services; programs remain on a virtual platform. Going well; have received very good feedback from consumers. A great addition to the program is art therapy; have received e-mails that consumers are feeling very confident in terms of their creative expression. Also, Dr. Springer

has started up again with the Adjustments of Vision Loss groups. Quality Assurance is taking a look at some of the groups to see if there is any way to improve further on services. Currently, there are approximately 14 students in the program.

Business Enterprises NJ (BENJ): Pick-up in openings; receiving vending machine requests from state/federal sites. Although there has been no movement with regard to the waiver, there is expectation that there will be support for the Randolph Shepard Program at some point.

CBVI staff are working very hard, and services continue on a virtual platform. If anyone hears of any issues that need to be resolved, Dr. Davis encouraged them to contact her.

Amanda Gerson – Vocational Rehabilitation Report:

Business Relations Unit (BRU): In collaboration with the Port Authority, the BRU held a virtual interview workshop on September 29, with approximately 20 consumers registering to participate. There was a follow-up mock interview workshop with Port Authority as well. Typically, there would be a disability mentoring day with Port Authority; however, they are in the midst of a hiring freeze this year, but still wanted to make sure they partnered with us, sharing information about the organization and doing the mock interviews. The BRU also made a recent connection with Amazon (in central NJ); had a good conversation with personnel that are in charge of diversity hiring and recruitment; they were very enthusiastic about recruiting individuals who are blind or visually impaired and deaf blind. Very hopeful as we have a direct person in there who could facilitate the communication around any accommodations that are needed. Also received a request from an organization called Accessible Pharmacy; they hired a few of our consumers. Also had two students who obtained one-year internships with a music company in New York City. Also working on getting counselors and consumers retrained on the talent acquisition portal, which is a disability focused hiring site, run by the Council of State administrators in VR, national employment team. The BRU is working to help consumers get access to a lot of virtual hiring events. Ida Behreini commented that when she talks with students a lot of them don't know about the talent acquisition portal; she was pleased to hear that outreach and retraining is taking place for this awesome program.

Doing great work towards meeting all requirements for the CAP. Will be sharing the recently completed documentation procedure with the SRC's sub-committee. Completed the update of VR service codes, creating a catalog of codes. Another main component from the VR perspective is time and status; not always meeting the 60 days to eligibility. So we created a number of reports, case review tools, audit, and really took a look at what the challenges/barriers were, and then created strategies. With the implementation of internal controls, quality assurance activities, and monitoring reports, we have gotten into the best compliance, and almost all of them have supporting documentation; making great progress on that to be able to have a 90% compliance for this quarter. Important to ensure our consumers are staying engaged and moving quickly through the VR process, and ultimately getting

successful employment outcomes. Some other findings that we are making great progress on, and hope to report as completed at the end of this month, are related to some of our fiscal policies and processes. CBVI's Chief of Fiscal has been working with the Department, Treasury and Legal, to get that information set up.

Other federal reports: finalizing the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), which is due at the end of this month. Also on track to finalize the 911 report, which is the quarterly performance report to RSA; due by November 15. Also, jointly submitted our annual report; submitted the information to DVR on September 23.

Memorandums of Understanding/Agreement (MOUs/MOAs): In the process of reviewing and obtaining approval to extend contracts with The College New Jersey; I Can Connect project, an equipment distribution project; as well as the SSP program, our support service providers. The SSP program continues remotely; e-mail blast recently done to remind people we are still providing SSP services. Look to strengthen that program in the next year to be able to provide a little more flexibility for deaf blind individuals. There are 2 other MOAs related to transition programs to renew as well; they have been finalized and submitted to the Department for final approval.

Continue to work on 511 compliance. Need to start providing outreach career counseling; information and referral to individuals who are employed at minimum wage in the sheltered workshops. A member of the staff has been assigned the responsibility of statewide 511 compliance; reaching out to the different workshops to let people know who she is and provide contact information.

The transition unit has also been working on getting referrals for summer programs. Anticipate having an open house for interested students for Work Skills Prep and the College Prep programs in the beginning of December. Keeping all options open at this point in terms of the method of program delivery. Virtual programming went amazingly well over this past spring/summer; students really enjoyed. Hope to provide the option next year of either virtual, in-person, or a hybrid model. A lot of lessons learned from providing services remotely these past seven months.

Vito DeSantis asked what the number of integrated competitive employment was as of September 30. Amanda reported that the number of successful closures for the 2020 fiscal year (Oct.1, 2019 –Sept. 30, 2020) was 162, which is a little down from last year (at approx. 180).

Vito commented on recent reports put out by the Federal Government pertaining to the two major segregated and/or non-competitive (sub-minimum wage) employment programs: Ability One and Sheltered Workshops/14C ticket holders. Essentially saying, activities are discriminatory in nature, paying less than the appropriate wage for the type of job being done. Amanda will forward these reports to everyone for review and further discussion.

Lia reported that a company that has a contract for COVID-19 contact tracing has announced they are ready to hire 500 new tracers. She felt this is something that can be done by someone with extensive Java skills; will forward contact information to Amanda to share with the BRU.

Sub-committees:

Business Engagement: nothing new to report; Jon Goodman working on setting up a meeting.

Policy & Procedure: Pat McKenna noted there were no policies at this time to review.

Quality Assurance: Clarke King reported that the committee had received QA reports from Kris Tucker prior to her departure in June; however, he was waiting on the most recent reports, and will then schedule a meeting. Dr. Whitmore noted she would forward the reports.

Old Business:

John Tkacz provided follow-up to a question raised by Vito at the last meeting about the potential shortage of State funds for match, due to revenue shortfalls. Although there's been attempts to have language included into any corporate relief package, providing a waiver for the 15% set aside, Congress has not been able to agree on legislation. John noted that the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) has not had any issues at this time.

Lia thanked everyone for their confidence in electing her as the SRC Chairperson. She acknowledged some concerns that were brought to her attention regarding a potential conflict of interest in her role at the Family Resource Network (FRN); therefore, she wanted to clarify. As Program Coordinator for the EDGE program she does not supervise any of the staff or mentors. She noted that, if at any point there is a vote or anything significant that comes before the SRC, which has to do with this transition program, she will recuse herself. She noted she is also open to any questions, thoughts, or feedback regarding her role in EDGE and the FRN with regard to how she fills her responsibilities as the Chair. She shared her contact information; noting the fastest way to reach her is by text; she can also be reached by phone or e-mail. At this time, Lia suggested a pause be put on the vice-chair election; hopefully have the election at the beginning of 2021. She recommended the focus now be put on establishing a set of by-laws through a fair and democratic committee process. This way, any votes going forward, everyone has the confidence there are clear rules. Dr. Davis commented that she is supportive of establishing by-laws. She noted that this would be a way to guide the SRC in RSA's federal mandates, particularly around financial conflicts of interest, as well as making sure the SRC is balanced and there's no perception of a conflict of interest. Vito also commented that he thought by-laws would be a good idea; not only to cover issues such as voting, but actually look at operational procedures, for example, the requirement of interaction between the other councils (DD, Mental Health, and also interaction with the Workforce System here in the state). All that can be created, and have a set of procedures on how the SRC should work based on the regulations.

New Business/ Announcements:

Amanda welcomed Donald Campbell, Executive Director of the Atlantic County Center for Independent Living. Amanda explained that Don is the new nominee recommended to the SRC from the State Independent Living Council (SILC). He joined today's meeting as a member of the public. Lia thanked Mr. Campbell, and welcomed him to the meeting. Don noted he has been the Director at the Atlantic Center for 4 years, and has cerebral palsy. He has also been a regular attendee of the SILC. He commented that he is excited about being part of the SRC, learning as much as he can and strengthening the relationship between the two councils.

Vito made a motion to establish a sub-committee to create SRC by-laws; membership to include at least 2 individuals from the SRC and one or two members of the Agency. Ida seconded the motion. All were in favor; the motion was passed. Volunteers & recommendations to serve on this sub-committee: SRC: Vito DeSantis as chair; Alice Eaddy; Jonathan Goodman. CBVI staff: Michelle Whitmore, Lou Mancuso.

Lia discussed the need to work on pursuing a working relationship with a couple of the other consumer councils in the State, namely DDD and Mental Health. She noted that Amanda has been working very hard for the last couple of years to establish a relationship with DDD; however, it is also important for other SRC members work on this partnership as well. Anyone interested in helping build those relationships, was asked to contact Lia, Amanda, or Dr. Davis.

In the past, as outlined in Section 105, part of the SRC meeting agenda included hearing from each member on any trends, new legislation, or updates from the group they represent. Future agendas to include this practice. Amanda will distribute a list of what seat everyone fills, to clear up any confusion about who each member formally represents.

Will Robinson commented on the impact the pandemic has had on the Randolph Sheppard (RS) program. Several of the managers haven't worked in more than seven months. In addition to the financial aspect, being stuck in the house for so long is a problem. In a recent committee meeting the discussion centered around reaching out to managers for a "wellness" check; sometimes they just need someone to talk to, someone that is in the same situation they are in. Dr. Davis agreed, this program has been impacted very heavily. She noted that CBVI's field representatives are responsible for reaching out and keeping in contact with the managers. She explained that their focus is on business, and fulfilling regulations, mandates, etc. The field reps can also provide information with regard to wellness (example: ASPIRE groups). Social workers have also distributed resource information. In addition, CBVI's outreach liaison has disseminated health resources. If anyone is aware of any additional resources, they were asked to share. As discussed earlier, this is an example of the importance of making sure the SRC is building up partnerships with other councils. Lia pointed out there are some resources for mental health support that are available; there is a whole page on The Department of Human Services website for anyone that is struggling.

Proposed meeting dates for 2021 will be sent to members; a vote to confirm meeting dates will take place at the next meeting. Meetings will remain virtual, until notified otherwise.

Members were asked to e-mail any suggestions they may have for SRC appointments to Amanda and Dr. Davis. Amanda reviewed terms that are ending, as well as pending:

- Alice & Lia - first terms ended earlier this year. Please e-mail updated resumes to Amanda.
- Pam, Clarke, Ida - first terms will be ending in March, 2021. If interested in serving a second term, will need to submit updated resumes to Amanda.
- Bill - paperwork ready to go to the Governor's office.
- Don Campbell (to replace Lisa K. Smith) - resume to be submitted to Amanda.
- Charles Ouslander (to replace Susan Head) – offered to resend his resume to Amanda.
- Kathleen Donnellon (to replace Danielle Licari) – paperwork being prepared for Governor approval.
- Replacements needed for Kris Tucker and Rick Fox
- Will be needing another Business & Industry rep coming up.
- Gary Altman, who represents the State Workforce Investment Board, his term will also be ending in April; will be reaching out to get a recommendation from them.

Bill Freeman reported that the Department of Education has a new Acting Commissioner - Angelica Allen-McMillan.

Amanda requested sub-committee chairs send her the names of each member on their committee.

Charles Ouslander asked Donald Campbell to contact Susan Head (609-203-1147) regarding re-scheduling their presentation.

Adjournment

Lia thanked everyone for attending today's meeting, and for their active participation.

Vito DeSantis made a motion to adjourn the meeting; this motion was seconded by Jon Goodman; all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for December 4, 2020.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant