

**Draft**

**Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual  
Impairment (GCBVI)**

**Full Council Meeting Minutes**

August 16, 2024

**Attendance**

**Members Present**

Bob Kresmer

Amy Porterfield

Nathan Pullen

Erin Pawlus

Brian Dulude

Mike Gordon

Donald Porterfield

Bea Shapiro

Jonathan Pringle

**Members Absent**

Steve Tepper

Annette Reichman

John McCann

David Steinmetz

Allan Curry

## **Staff Present**

Lindsey Powers

## **Guests Present**

Kristen Mackey

Stephanie Johnson

Jami Parente

Elizabeth Webb

Joyceline Elliot

Lisa Yencarelli

Neva Fowler

Debbie Hanlon CART

Karla Martin CART

## **Minutes**

### **Call to Order and Introductions**

Bob Kresmer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:33 p.m. Introductions were made, a quorum was present, and the procedural meeting rules were explained.

### **Approval of May 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Amy Porterfield moved to approve the minutes of the May 17, 2024 GCBVI Full Council meeting as written. Jonathan Pringle seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved by majority voice vote.

### **GCBVI Chairperson's Report**

Bob Kresmer stated he had the opportunity to speak to individuals about the GCBVI and what the council does. Mr. Kresmer inquired regarding the open positions within the council. Lindsey Powers stated there were open representations for the Arizona Council of the Blind (AzCB), the Arizona National Federation of the Blind (NFBA), the Blinded Veterans Association

(BVA), and a parent of visually impaired child. Bob Kresmer encouraged council members to continue recruitment efforts to fill the open positions.

### **GCBVI Annual Report**

Bob Kresmer stated the council would review the GCBVI Annual Report and schedule a meeting to approve the report for submission.

### **RSA Administrator's Report**

Kristen Mackey stated Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) was still under a head count cap, although the agency was permitted to fill 3 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) positions per month. Ms. Mackey stated the agency was also permitted to request salary adjustments for some current staff members and was seeking justification for new hires as well. She noted that travel was being scrutinized, and only 2 staff members were allowed to travel to conferences or events. Kristen Mackey stated RSA had implemented the centralized purchasing unit, which had consolidated and streamlined work. She noted the agency had not received the Federal monitoring report, although the agency had begun working on improving work between the fiscal units, updating policies to align with Federal language and minor updates to the Transition contract language. Ms. Mackey stated the comprehensive services would be moving to the Managed Service Provider (MSP), which would allow for more flexibility of services.

Kristen Mackey stated RSA had expended the full 15% set aside for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and would not be reverting any funds. She noted that Arizona was under a formula grant and would therefore receive a small increase in grant funds to account for the cost of living, and there had been no change to the state budget. Kristen Mackey stated the new case management system was still in development, although there had been some delays, and the launch date would be moved back. Kristen Mackey stated the agency had started the customized employment pilot in which 3 vendors were undergoing training on providing services to clients. Ms. Mackey stated RSA would be holding an all-staff conference on October 8<sup>th</sup>, and she was excited to get all staff together again and to focus on what it means to offer employment services. Kristen Mackey thanked the council members that participated in the marketing outreach focus groups as

RSA determined what people know about VR and what people would like to know. She noted the agency would be developing marketing and outreach materials which would be consistent across all programs within the agency. Kristen Mackey added that she wanted to remain mindful when marketing so that the agency did not have to revert back to a wait list for new clients. Amy Porterfield inquired whether RSA had considered applying for a Federal grant through the Department of Education for enhanced services. Kristen Mackey stated the agency was not actively pursuing that grant, although the agency was considering other options. Bob Kresmer stated he had participated in the marketing outreach focus group and was impressed with the marketing business's inclusion of different disability populations. Mr. Kresmer inquired regarding the qualification requirements for VRCs. Kristen Mackey stated the minimum requirement for a VRC was a Bachelor's degree with preferred experience of working with individuals with disabilities. Bob Kresmer inquired whether RSA offered tuition reimbursement for VRCs to obtain additional education. Kristen Mackey stated the Department of Economic Security (DES) offered tuition reimbursement related to a staff members' current position. She added that RSA also had an agreement with the University of Arizona to assist staff in obtaining their Master's degrees or to get their CRC certification.

## **SBVID Program Manager Report**

Brian Dulude stated that he had shared the SBVID scorecard with the council and the noteworthy statistics were the number of placements, which was 3 times more and the number of successful closures had doubled. Brian Dulude stated there were 151 individuals on the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) wait list and individuals were waiting for 308 services. He noted that 6 individuals received services in August so far, 33 in July, and 6 in June. He added that vendors provided services to 5 individuals in August, 23 in July, and 6 in June. Mr. Dulude noted that SBVID was also now working with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) to provide services to individuals. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the variability in the numbers of individuals receiving services. Brian Dulude stated the program lost the Program Manager, and it took time to connect with individuals and vendors. Bob Kresmer inquired whether SBVID had been successful in reaching individuals in rural areas. Brian Dulude stated SBVID partnered with vendors

that were able to provide services to individuals in rural areas. Brian Dulude stated SBVID had collaborated with the council on providing blindness training for current and new staff. He noted the program was working with the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI), the Foundation for Blind Children (FBC), and SAAVI Services for the Blind. Mr. Dulude stated 2 VRCs would receive training each month from the vendors in areas such as cane travel, and independent living skills such as cooking and cleaning. Mr. Kresmer inquired whether the VRCs were the only staff to receive the training. Brian Dulude stated that VRCs would receive the training first as they provided direct services to individuals.

Jami Parente stated that 22 youth had participated in the Summer Youth Transition program, which was a greater number than the previous year. She noted SBVID had 4 vacancies in the VRCs that worked with blind and visually impaired clients, and that some of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHOH) VRCs were assisting with those cases. Jami Parente stated SBVID had hired a new BVI supervisor for central Phoenix and northern Arizona, as well as a supervisor for northern Arizona. Jami Parente stated SBVID had exceeded the placement goals with 93 placements and the DHOH placement goals with 155. She added the exits with employment goal had been achieved with 159 placements as well. Ms. Parente stated 4 staff were receiving blindness training and 2 received training in July. Jami Parente stated she had compiled a list of Computer Based Trainings (CBT)s and had shared with staff as part of their professional development. She noted that SBVID had received 36 referrals in May, 28 in June, and 41 in July. Jami Parente stated the program was challenged with the change to the captioning contract, which included many amendments. She added that all BVI contracts would end in November and would need to be renewed. Jami Parente noted the program was also working with the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) to enhance the VR/BEP process and she was working with Joyceline Elliot to develop Best Practices.

### **BEP Program Update**

Joyceline Elliot stated the arbitration with Fort Huachuca had ended with the decision being in favor of BEP. Ms. Elliot stated the Arizona Department of Corrections contract would be a 15-year contract, which would end in 2039, and the Marana military base contract would begin a second year. Joyceline

Elliot stated a new post office was opening in Avondale, and BEP would conduct a site visit in September for potential vending services. She noted BEP had also added sites in Mesa, Pima, Phoenix, Scottsdale and Florence. Bob Kresmer inquired how BEP was marketing the program to individuals not familiar with the program. Joyceline Elliot stated BEP was attending events to provide marketing and was working on developing new marketing materials. She added that if any VR client was interested in the program, they would be connected with a BEP operator to answer any of their questions. Brian Dulude noted that nationally, the BEP programs are run by VR, and did not typically have many new trainees. He noted that Arizona had 3 new operators licensed in the past year, and 7 new vending sites in an effort to evolve post pandemic. Kristen Mackey added that the new marketing materials would include BEP marketing materials as well.

## **ASDB Report**

Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB had started the new school year with 1192 students. She noted that registration had not happened yet, and she would run the numbers again for an accurate count. Lisa Yencarelli stated there was 1 vacant position for a birth-3 itinerant teacher, 3 open positions for itinerant teachers, 1 in Orientation and Mobility, 1 in northern Arizona, 1 in Tucson, and 1 in the Phoenix Day School for the Deaf. Ms. Yencarelli stated ASDB was fully staffed with 17 Braille production staff, who were in the various stages of certification. She stated ASDB would be holding a White Cane Day as well as the State Braille Challenge in February. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB had written the master facility plan and would follow through. She added the agency was also under the head count cap, and that staff travel had been reduced unless it was required for the position.

## **GCBVI Committee Reports**

### **Legislative and Public Policy Committee**

Amy Porterfield stated that many of the advocacy efforts had been followed up through consumer groups. Ms. Porterfield stated that if the AzCB had any resolutions from their State Conference, that they could be shared with the council for review.

## **AT Committee**

Bea Shapiro stated the AT Committee would be providing a presentation at the upcoming Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE) in November. She noted the presentation would be "Open our Eyes to AI" and would provide an overview of AI and how individuals could effectively and successfully use AI. She added the committee also continued to partner with Sun Sounds to provide the committee's podcast and to broaden the audience that could access the podcast.

## **Ex-Officio Member and Blindness Community Organization Updates**

### **Arizona Talking Book Library**

Elizabeth Webb stated the Library had completed the Summer Reading program for youth and adults and had awarded the winners. Ms. Webb stated that adults were to read at least 14 books in the genre of adventure, and could read about time or train travel, or books set in national parks. She added the Library had visited 17 rural libraries in Mohave County and would be visiting 28-30 more libraries in northern Arizona next week. Elizabeth Webb stated the Library was now offering cultural passes, which was a free program offered by most public libraries. Ms. Webb stated that more information would be shared about the program through the library newsletter for current patrons. Amy Porterfield stated that it had been great working with the library, and that many SAAVI students had been able to volunteer with the library.

Erin Pawlus stated the Library would be offering BARD Express, which would allow patrons to download a file onto their personal device rather than a BARD player cartridge, and that patrons would be able to locate the file on their computer. Ms. Pawlus stated the Art of Whine event would be held on September 27<sup>th</sup> at the Heard Museum and would be a silent auction. Erin Pawlus stated the Library was attempting to process another attempt to pilot the Bookshare program through Federal funds and thanked individuals who had submitted their support letters. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the number of applications for Library services. Erin Pawlus stated the Library applications had been down slightly but had recently increased lately.

Elizabeth Webb agreed and stated the Library had received 59 new applications in August and 93 in July.

### **National Federation of the Blind**

Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA state conference would be held in Phoenix from August 22-23 at the Hyatt, and the theme was "Owning Our Collective Identity". He noted there would be many seminars on Friday, with approximately 200 individuals attending. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA would then be preparing for the upcoming Legislative session and celebrating Blind Equality Achievement month.

### **SAAVI Services for the Blind**

Mike Gordon stated that SAAVI students had attended the NFB National Conference in July, and the next one would be in New Orleans. He noted the conferences were week-long conferences and were quite impactful for attendees. Mr. Gordon stated 15 students had attended the Transition Student Summer Camp. He noted the residential program had moved to apartments in central Tucson, which allowed greater access to the community. Mike Gordon stated the National Blind Certification was coming up, and multiple staff would be attending training at the Colorado and Louisiana Centers for the Blind for exposure to different techniques. Amy Porterfield stated SAAVI had also served 30 K-middle school students and had provided tutoring in Phoenix. Ms. Porterfield stated SAAVI also had installed a new playground in Tucson.

### **HKNC**

Jonathan Pringle stated the HKNC had undergone some changes in which the HKNC Director and the Director of Field Operations had retired recently. Mr. Pringle stated 3 students in July and 3-4 in August had received employment outcomes or had enrolled in school. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the number of students that participated in the Transition Summer Youth program. Jonathan Pringle stated a couple of students had planned to participate, although their applications were not completed on time. He noted the organization would continue to work with students in preparation for the next summer program.



## **Agenda Items and Date for Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the GCBVI Full Council will be on November 15, 2024 from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm.

## **Announcements**

There were no announcements.

## **Call to the Public**

A call to the public was made with no response's forthcoming.

## **Adjournment of Meeting**

Amy Porterfield moved to adjourn the meeting. Nathan Pullen seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 pm.

## **Statistics**

As of June 30, 2024, the statistics are:

The total number of individuals in VR was 3,100

The total number of veterans in the VR program were 86

The total number of individuals in OOS was 0

The total number of individuals in Priority 2 was 0

The total number of individuals in Priority 3 was 0

The total number of applicants for the VR Program was 211

The average number of days from application to eligibility was 39.2

The median number of days from application to eligibility was 23

The eligibility compliance was 81.1%

The number of new plans written was 977

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 72.24

The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 56.75

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 78%

The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$56.25

The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$14.20

The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes was \$27.70

The number of clients placed in employment was 78

The number of clients closed successfully in employment was 49

As of June 30, 2024, the Deaf Blind Population statistics:

The total number of individuals in VR was 220

The total number of veterans in VR program was 4

The total number of individuals in OOS was 0

The total number of individuals in Priority 2 was 0

The total number of individuals in Priority 3 was 0

The total number of applicants for the VR Program was 17

The average number of days from application to eligibility was 28

The median number of days from application to eligibility was 34.3

The eligibility compliance was 95%

The number of new plans written was 45

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 133.71

The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 120.83

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 53.7%

The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$25.54

The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$25.54

The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$19.61

The number of clients placed in employment was 2

The number of clients closed successfully was 3