

**Draft**

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

**Full Council Meeting Minutes**

November 15, 2024

**Attendance**

**Members Present**

Bob Kresmer

Amy Porterfield

Nathan Pullen

Erin Pawlus

Brian Dulude

Mike Gordon

Donald Porterfield

Bea Shapiro

Steve Tepper

David Steinmetz

Jonathan Pringle

**Members Absent**

Jonathan Pringle

Annette Reichman

Allan Curry

## **Staff Present**

Lindsey Powers

## **Guests Present**

Kristen Mackey

Stephanie Johnson

Jami Parente

Maria Bravo

Natalia Verdin

Niraj Parikh

Joyceline Elliot

Sue Kay Kneifel

Debbie Hanlon CART

Karla Martin CART

## **Minutes**

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

Bob Kresmer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:36 p.m. Introductions were made, a quorum was present, and the procedural meeting rules were explained.

### **Approval of August 16, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Bea Shapiro moved to approve the minutes of the August 16, 2024 GCBVI Full Council meeting as written. Nathan Pullen seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved by majority voice vote.

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

Bob Kresmer stated he had been involved in meetings with VR and blindness vendors to discuss ideas for program improvements. Kristen Mackey stated that RSA hosted meetings with VR and ILOB vendors to discuss what was

working and what could be improved. Bob Kresmer stated the council had also been represented at various conferences and events and he encouraged council members to participate in events.

Bob Kresmer stated there had been discussion around changing the council's name to Governor's Council on Blindness and Low Vision and inquired regarding the council members' thoughts. John McCann inquired whether the council could change the name. Bob Kresmer stated the council could make the recommendation to the Governor's office, where it could be approved. Jeff Bishop stated that he agreed with the proposed name change. Bea Shapiro stated that "low vision" was universally used and agreed with the suggestion.

### **Center for Assistive Technology Training Presentation**

Niraj Parikh thanked the council for the opportunity to present information regarding CATT, which partnered with the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) and Foundation for Blind Children (FBC). Mr. Parikh stated CATT provided training for students and parents of children K-12. He noted that CATT provided Assistive Technology (AT) to teachers of blind and visually impaired students, as it was difficult for teachers to learn new AT each school year. Niraj Parikh stated CATT would provide training in person, virtually, or through recorded training videos. Mr. Parikh stated CATT also provided Braille displays, Braille embossers, Braille teaching tools, screen readers and specialized needs products. Brian Dulude inquired whether CATT could provide training for Duxbury Braille embosser. Niraj Parikh stated CATT could provide Duxbury training. Kristen Mackey inquired whether CATT could provide AT training to VR staff or only K-12 students. Niraj Parikh stated CATT could provide training to a teacher, and any VR staff that wanted to receive training also.

### **GCBVI Annual Report**

Bob Kresmer stated the council had voted to move the GCBVI Annual Report forward for submission.

### **GCBVI Officer Elections**

Bob Kresmer stated the officer positions of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary were open for elections. Mr. Kresmer noted that in the past, the Nominating Committee would put forth a slate of candidates for council members, or the council would vote during the Full Council meeting. Bob Kresmer inquired

regarding the council's preference for officer elections. John McCann stated that if anyone could nominate a member, the council could move forward with elections. John McCann called three times if any council members were interested in nominating another council member or themselves for an officer position. Hearing no nominations, John McCann motioned that Bob Kresmer be elected as Chair, Amy Porterfield be elected as Vice Chair, and David Steinmetz be elected as Secretary. Bea Shapiro seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a unanimous voice vote.

## **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. Kristen Mackey stated RSA had not received the Federal monitoring report, although she would share it once the agency received it. Kristen Mackey stated RSA had established internal workshops to examine the agency's attrition rate and to identify why clients would leave the program before receiving VR services and after establishing an IEP. Ms. Mackey stated the MSP allowed RSA to now offer 20 services with 109 providers, giving clients more options for services. Kristen Mackey stated the centralized purchasing unit had reduced the errors by 40% and allowed for quicker payments to vendors. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was on track to implementing the new case management system, In Formed in July 2025 and was currently testing the system. She noted that RSA would offer in-person and virtual training to staff prior to implementation of the system. Kristen Mackey stated RSA also created a customized employment pilot program with 9 clients and 3 providers and would begin testing for about 6 months for a potential statewide program. Ms. Mackey stated RSA held an all-staff conference on October 8<sup>th</sup>, and it was a great day for staff to get together and learn. Ms. Mackey stated RSA was working with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party provider to develop marketing materials which were consistent with state, DES, and Arizona@Work branding.

Kristen Mackey stated RSA met or exceeded the program's performance measures with 53% employed after exit, 49.6% still employed, and a median earning of \$4706. She noted the agency was seeking technical assistance regarding the credential attainment rate of 24.7%. Bob Kresmer inquired whether RSA was able to offer travel reimbursement for

comprehensive blindness vendors. Kristen Mackey stated she was informed that it could be explored under the new contract. Mike Gordon inquired whether the vendor payments would be under Knowledge Services. Kristen Mackey stated the payments would move to the MSP. Mike Gordon inquired whether that would lessen the in-house payments. Kristen Mackey stated that it would streamline the payment process, as well as the team of 16 Purchasing Technicians.

## **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 their 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 blind 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 goals had been achieved with 159 placements as well. Ms. Parente stated 4 staff were receiving blind training and 2 received training in July. Jami Parente stated she had compiled a list of Computer Based Trainings (CBT) 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 a BEP trainee had finished training and been awarded the Perryville Prison. Joyceline Elliot stated BEP had also filled a BEP Consultant position. She added BEP had added 2 new sites in Phoenix and had updated the BEP Policy Manual. Joyceline Elliot noted the median earning for a BEP consultant was \$59,000 to \$89,000. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the Arizona Department of Corrections contract. Joyceline Elliot stated the contract had been awarded for 15 years.

## **GCBVI Committee Reports**

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

Amy Porterfield stated the committee had recently reviewed the VR Policy Manual and noticed that some parts had been removed from the 2019 version. She noted her understanding that the policy manual had been streamlined to align with DES verbiage, although some policies had been removed, which could be helpful to new VRCs. Kristen Mackey stated that some of the changes had been shared with the council in 2016 and 2017 and agreed there had been a push to streamline the manual overall. Ms. Mackey stated RSA had moved away from using procedures in lieu of standard works

and resource guides. Amy Porterfield stated that a resource guide would be very helpful, and the council would be happy to support any further efforts to create training materials.

### **AT Committee**

Bea Shapiro stated the AT Committee had provided a presentation on Artificial Intelligence (AI) at Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE), which was well attended. Bea Shapiro stated the committee had also drafted a letter to the Governor's office regarding the recent Department of Justice (DOJ)s regulations regarding website accessibility and the suggestion that all state agencies comply with the measures. Jeff Bishop stated the state universities were addressing the issue, and the committee felt it should be addressed by the state as well. Bea Shapiro noted that smaller states had 3 years to address the issue, and larger states had 2 years. Bob Kresmer stated if the council approved, the letter could go to the Legislative and Public Policy Committee to make any minor changes before sharing with the Governor's office. The council agreed that the letter could be shared with the Governor's office.

### **Public Information**

David Steinmetz stated the recent VRATE event had been well attended with great exhibitors and presenters and the VRATE Board had started planning for the next event. Mr. Steinmetz stated the VRATE Board was also looking for any individuals interested in serving on the Board.

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

#### **Arizona Talking Book Library**

Erin Pawlus stated the library would be holding an Open House on March 15<sup>th</sup>, which would be the first in person event in several years. Ms. Pawlus stated library staff attended the recent VRATE event and brought ibill currency readers for individuals attending the event. She added the library had announced the launch of the free cultural passes in the recent newsletter. Erin Pawlus stated the library's application would include the recent parental acknowledgement that the library's materials were open to all patrons including children. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the program to update the cartridge readers. Erin Pawlus stated the cartridge readers would be updated. John McCann stated he enjoyed being able to download books directly from the library's website.

### **Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Steve Tepper stated ACBVI received a grant with Adelante Health for a substance abuse pilot program. He noted the organization had also signed an agreement with Cesar Chavez and continued to serve clients.

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

Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA state conference was held in Phoenix August 22-23 at the Hyatt, with approximately 200 in attendance. Donald Porterfield stated October was Blind Equality month, and NFBA was excited to get out into the community. He added that scholarships would be available for students, and he encouraged individuals to apply. Amy Porterfield stated that Congressman Stanton had recently co-sponsored an autonomous vehicle act and had partnered with Waymo. She noted the NFBA would hold a session to thank Mr. Stanton for the support and would forward the information to the council. Erin Pawlus inquired whether the meeting would be shared on social media. Donald Porterfield stated the meeting would be shared on the organization's social media sites.

### **Arizona Council of the Blind**

Jeff Bishop stated AzCB had been present at VRATE and was participating in state and national level education opportunities. He noted that 450 individuals had participated in an immersive training course on Office 365 and through a partnership with Microsoft and APH. Jeff Bishop stated AzCB had been growing the membership and had great things planned.

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

Mike Gordon stated the organization had been granted certification from the National Blind Certification, which was a long time coming. Amy Porterfield stated the organization also held the Dare to be Remarkable program, where people gathered for a 3-day conference. Ms. Porterfield stated SAAVI also provided services to seniors and encouraged seniors to participate in fun programs. Mike Gordon noted that it was rewarding to see staff discuss their jobs with new staff and to hear them speak about their work.

### **Arizona Industries for the Blind**

David Steinmetz stated AIB continued to focus on core competencies and had welcomed 4 new team members. He added that the fulfillment center had expanded geographically to support Fort Huachuca and El Centro. David



Steinmetz added that AIB would begin upward mobility training and mentoring services.

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

The next meeting of the GCBVI Full Council will be on February 21, 2025 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 forthcoming.

### **Adjournment of Meeting**

Amy Porterfield moved to adjourn the meeting. Donald Porterfield seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.

## **Statistics**

As of September 30, 2024, the statistics are:

The total number of individuals in VR was 827

The total number of veterans in the VR program were 24

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 70

The average number of days from application to eligibility was 23.1

The median number of days from application to eligibility was 8

The eligibility compliance was 94%

The number of new plans written was 240

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 58.4

The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 37

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 96%

The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$50.88

The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$14.28

The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes was \$19.47

The number of clients placed in employment was 12

The number of clients closed successfully in employment was 21

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

The total number of individuals in VR was 51

The total number of veterans in VR program was 1

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 1

The average number of days from application to eligibility was 29

The median number of days from application to eligibility was 29

The eligibility compliance was 100%

The number of new plans written was 12

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 111

The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 111

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 100%

The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was NA

The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was NA

The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was NA

The number of clients placed in employment was 1

The number of clients closed successfully was 0