

Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI)
Full Council Meeting Minutes
November 20, 2020

Members Present

Bob Kresmer
Ted Chittenden
David Steinmetz
Mike Gordon
Bea Shapiro
Nathan Pullen
Brian Dulude
Terri Hedgpath
George Martinez

Members Absent

Amy Porterfield
Donald Porterfield
Janet Fisher
Michael Bailey
Allan Curry
Annette Reichman

Staff Present

Lindsey Powers

Guests Present

Kristen Mackey
Lisa Yencarelli
Steve Tepper
Vasant Garcia
Anna Miller
Amanda Byllesby
Eve Sanchez

Call to Order and Introductions

Bob Kresmer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:35 p.m. Introductions were made, a quorum was present, and the procedural meeting rules were explained.

Approval of August 21, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Terri Hedgpeth moved to approve the minutes of the August 21, 2020 GCBVI Full Council meeting as written. Nathan Pullen seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by majority voice vote.

GCBVI Chairperson's Report

Bob Kresmer stated he had been working with the Governor's Office on issues such as ensuring accessible voting for blind and visually impaired individuals. Mr. Kresmer stated he had been informed that any changes to accessible voting would need to be approved by the Legislature and Secretary of State, Katie Hobbs, indicated that she would be reluctant to make any changes due to the contentious upcoming election. Bob Kresmer stated the Governor's Office would be open to continued discussion once the Legislature returned to the office. Bob Kresmer stated he also had discussions regarding the Executive Order that opened highway rest stops and allowed food trucks to operate on temporary permits. Mr. Kresmer stated the food trucks significantly impacted the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) vendors, who had vending operations at the rest stops. Bob Kresmer stated the Governor's Office representative indicated that it would be quite difficult to overrule an Executive Order prior to the end of an emergency, although he would continue those discussions.

GCBVI Officer Elections

Bob Kresmer stated the Executive Committee met and was nominating Bob Kresmer as Chair, Terri Hedgpeth as Vice Chair, and Amy Porterfield as Secretary. Bob Kresmer stated he would accept nominations from the floor for the Chair position. Terri Hedgpeth motioned that Bob Kresmer be elected as Chair. Ted Chittenden seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote. Bob Kresmer stated he would accept nominations from the floor for the Vice Chair position. Bea Shapiro motioned that Terri Hedgpeth be elected as Vice Chair. Ted Chittenden seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote. Bob Kresmer stated that Amy Porterfield was unable to attend the meeting, although she had served in leadership positions on the council. Bob Kresmer stated that Ms. Porterfield had indicated her interest in serving as the Secretary, and to assist in recording official documents. Bob Kresmer stated he would accept nominations from the floor for the Secretary position. Ted Chittenden motioned that Amy Porterfield be elected as Secretary. Terri Hedgpeth seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Bob Kresmer stated that he had asked Allan Curry to develop a new committee that would be dedicated to social and human services. Bob Kresmer noted he received many calls from blind and visually impaired individuals that experienced discrimination, were put out of their housing, or experienced challenges in the prison system. Ted Chittenden stated the role of the council was to review state policy and state positions and inquired regarding the role of the new committee. Bob Kresmer stated the council received complaints from individuals in rural areas, where their needs were not met, and he hoped the council could find a way to address those issues.

Council Membership Discussion

Bob Kresmer stated Ed Gervasoni had recently resigned from the GCBVI after serving on the council for many years. Bob Kresmer stated that Mr. Gervasoni had been influential in steering the overall direction of the council and in serving as the Chair of the Deaf Blind Issues Committee. Bob Kresmer stated Ed Gervasoni had retired from the Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and Blind (ASDB) and was volunteering in the community.

Effects of Pandemic on Students and Adults

Bob Kresmer stated the community continued to shelter in place and to meet with others virtually, which influenced students and adults. Bob Kresmer stated he would like to hear from organizations that provided services to blind and visually impaired individuals and how they were able to provide virtual services. Mike Gordon stated that SAAVI Services for the Blind began providing services virtually in March and determined who needed equipment. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI was able to provide some in-person services to Transition students one day a week. Mr. Gordon noted that national and state conferences were held virtually. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI was beginning to provide some hybrid virtual and in-person services in October, although the organization would go back to virtual services after Thanksgiving and would reassess, as necessary. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI received a Payroll Protection Loan to continue providing services.

Bob Kresmer stated Steve Tepper was the new CEO of the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI) and had applied for membership to the council. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI was offering hybrid services and had opened to in-person services that week. Mr. Tepper stated some services would remain virtual indefinitely, although the organization would expand in-person learning as appropriate. Steve Tepper noted that some staff would continue to work remotely as well. Brian Dulude stated that Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) had been working remotely since March, which included Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff, BEP, and

Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) staff. Brian Dulude stated 99% of staff had equipment such as cell phones and laptops and were able to perform their work virtually. Brian Dulude stated that staff such as teachers of the blind and visually impaired were also working remotely, although BEP continued to conduct site surveys. Bob Kresmer inquired whether staff would likely continue to work remotely. Brian Dulude stated that staff would continue to offer virtual services, although RSA would inform the council when staff would resume work in the office. Mr. Dulude noted that RSA would continue to follow CDC guidelines for when staff could return to the office, although RSA would likely follow a hybrid approach. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was beginning to discuss how staff could improve upon service delivery to clients remotely as well as in the community.

Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB was offering hybrid services for students on campus and itinerant services were offered according to the school district. Ted Chittenden inquired whether the shutdown had affected ACBVI and SAAVI's private sources of revenue. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI donations remained even, although some donors had stopped offering donations. Mike Gordon stated some private donations had waned, although SAAVI was able to receive funding through the CARES Act and other COVID-19 related emergency funding. David Steinmetz inquired how RSA was able to perform outreach to new clients in the community. Brian Dulude stated RSA was able to have a presence at various conferences and events, such as the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) State Conference and the Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE). Terri Hedgpeth stated the new iPhone 12 had lidar, which was helpful for individuals to social distance, and inquired whether RSA would consider procuring those phones for staff. Brian Dulude stated RSA was interested in getting the necessary equipment to staff and would consider any necessary tools.

RSA Administrator's Report

Kristen Mackey stated RSA was preparing for the future and when it would be safe to provide in-person services. Kristen Mackey stated that vendors and clients could meet in person if they were comfortable, although vendors were permitted to provide services virtually as well. Ms. Mackey stated RSA would develop a plan for when staff could resume working in the office with all equipment needs, with 30 days' notice. Kristen Mackey stated there had been no Congressional approval of the budget, although RSA received a partial award for the VR and OIB programs. Ms. Mackey stated it was unclear whether the Supported Employment grant would be supported, although it was typically up for debate. Kristen Mackey stated RSA continued to support BEP staff costs, so the program could continue to match funds. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was successful in resolving the

eligibility compliance rating last quarter as well as resolving the agreement with the State Education agency. Kristen Mackey stated RSA continued to work on the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) development compliance and noted RSA was at 85% last quarter and needed to reach 90% for two consecutive quarters.

Kristen Mackey stated RSA continued to distribute Client Satisfaction Surveys and noted that clients with open cases reported 94% satisfied with being treated with courtesy and respect and 76% reported satisfaction with the amount of contact with their counselor, which was a repeated complaint. Kristen Mackey stated that clients with closed cases reported 79% satisfied with how they were treated, and 57% reported in receiving assistance specific to their situation. Kristen Mackey noted some clients would enter the VR program expecting a specific item or employment goal, and would leave dissatisfied, although RSA would continue to focus on improving communication with clients. Kristen Mackey stated RSA saw a dramatic decrease in referrals and were currently about 30-40% less than the previous year, although the number of referrals tended to fluctuate with the changing COVID cases. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was asked to present in a virtual showcase to the RSA Commissioner and Legislative representatives. She noted RSA provided an overview of the Independent Living (IL) program, of VR's work with Sonoran UCEDD, and the Pre-Employment Transition (Pre-ETS) services as well as an overview of the Arizona Management System (AMS). Mike Gordon inquired regarding the status of the Pre-ETS contract. Kristen Mackey stated RSA would resolicit the contract and she would provide the contact information of the Procurement Specialist that could provide more information. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding RSA's plans for utilizing a new case management system. Kristen Mackey stated RSA would likely be able to obtain additional support from Libera, which would allow RSA time to move to another case management system. Bob Kresmer inquired whether any case management systems would be accessible. Kristen Mackey stated there were systems that were developed for VR programs and had accessibility systems built in.

SBVID Program Manager Report

Brian Dulude stated the total number of individuals in VR in 2019 was 855 and was 767 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated in 2019, there were 26 veterans and 25 in 2020. Mr. Dulude stated the number of VR applications was 65 in 2019 and 34 in 2020. He noted the average number of days from application to eligibility in 2019 was 49 and was 61 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the median number of days from application to eligibility in 2019 was 25.5 and was 43 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the eligibility determination compliance within 60 days was 89.2% in 2019 and 83.3% in 2020. Brian

Dulude stated the number of plans written in 2019 was 202 and 135 in 2020. He stated the average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 106 in 2019 and 131 in 2020. He added the highest hourly wage in 2019 was \$37.30 and \$76.00 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated 19 clients were placed in 2019 and 15 were placed in 2020. Brian Dulude stated 12 clients were placed successfully in 2019 and 4 in 2020.

Brian Dulude stated there were 40 VR clients that were deaf blind in 2019 and 41 in 2020. He stated the number of VR applications was 0 in 2019 and 2 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the average number of days from application to eligibility in 2019 was 49 and 28 in 2020. He noted the eligibility compliance determination was 100% in 2019 and 2020. Brian Dulude stated the average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 103 in 2019 and 100 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the compliance within 90 days was 100% in 2019 and 100% in 2020. He stated 0 individuals were placed in employment in 2019 and 0 individual was placed in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the number of clients closed with employment in 2019 was 1 and 0 in 2020. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the staff turnover rate attributed to some of the lower statistics. Brian Dulude stated staff turnover rate did affect some processes as well as several new Supervisors. Ted Chittenden inquired whether any blind and visually impaired clients had lost their jobs and had to return to VR. Brian Dulude stated some clients in the hospitality and food service industry had been affected by the pandemic although he did not have exact statistics. Mr. Dulude noted that job ready clients were having success with using AZ Job Connection and ARIZONA@WORK for obtaining employment. David Steinmetz inquired whether job placement indicated that an individual obtained employment and a successful closure indicated that an individual had retained employment. Brian Dulude confirmed that was correct. Mr. Steinmetz inquired regarding the gap in the number of individuals placed but not closed successfully. Kristen Mackey stated the data showed a snapshot in time and noted an individual could have been placed after the required 90 days timeframe. Ms. Mackey noted that some clients did not provide proof of employment, which was required to show that individual was employed. David Steinmetz inquired whether RSA tracked the number of clients that did not complete VR. Kristen Mackey stated RSA tracked the overall number of individuals that exited without employment.

Bob Kresmer inquired whether there was a wait list for individuals seeking OIB services. Brian Dulude stated there were 5 rehabilitation teachers statewide, who were primarily working with OIB clients. Brian Dulude stated RSA did not have Assistive Technology (AT) and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instructors, although clients could receive those services from ACBVI and SAAVI. Brian Dulude stated there were 165 on the OIB wait list, in

which the majority were living in Maricopa County and some individuals were in Pima County. Brian Dulude stated that Karla Rivas-Parker had retired, and he was in the process of updating that position description prior to posting the position. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the salaries were increased for the rehabilitation teachers' positions. Brian Dulude stated the increased salaries would continue to be a priority. Bob Kresmer congratulated Brian Dulude on his one-year anniversary with SBVID. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the preparations for the Youth Transition Summer Program. Brian Dulude stated SBVID intended to hold virtual workshops, in which SAAVI, Foundation for Blind Children (FBC), Blind Inc, and the Colorado Center for the Blind would present via Zoom.

BEP Program Update

Nathan Pullen stated BEP continued to struggle and most facilities were closed. Nathan Pullen stated the only open facilities were the Federal Courthouse Cafeteria in Tucson and the Indian Medical Center snack bar, as well as most vending routes and the military dining facility in Fort Huachuca. Mr. Pullen stated the pandemic had also affected vending services at the highway rest stops. Nathan Pullen stated BEP had 3 licensees that had completed the BEP training, in which 1 had been selected to take over services from a retired operator. Nathan Pullen stated BEP was developing the new vending route in Yavapai County and were temporarily subcontracting the route in northern Arizona. Nathan Pullen stated BEP was installing a Starbucks coffee shop in the Chandler Library, which would be open when the library reopened to the public. Nathan Pullen stated BEP continued to conduct site surveys and received continued interest in small sites that could be additions to existing routes. Nathan Pullen stated all prison locations were closed for visitors, although BEP had some success in providing services to the Administrative offices in some of the prisons. Nathan Pullen stated the Florence Prison had started phasing out the prison units and the operator for that prison would eventually be displaced. Nathan Pullen stated BEP had discussed a potential micro market at the Marine Base in Yuma, which could be a large opportunity. Bob Kresmer inquired how the Arizona BEP program compared to other states in terms of supporting the operators. Nathan Pullen stated BEP had been proactive and reacted quickly to support the operators in providing support payments. He noted that each year, BEP had an excess in operating surplus, which had been returned to vendors. Nathan Pullen stated that due to the pandemic, BEP had provided those funds as monthly payments to operators.

ASDB Report

Lisa Yencarelli stated the Phoenix Day School for the Deaf (PDSD) was able to open for in-person instruction on October 6th, and the Tucson campus location was able to open on October 27th. Ms. Yencarelli stated the Phoenix campus was serving 198 students in person and 61 students online. She noted the Tucson campus was serving 11 students online and 31 in person. Lisa Yencarelli stated the regional co-operatives were serving 264 in the Phoenix area, 200 in Region 1 and 118 in the Southeastern area. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB was focusing on the needs of the families, and had supplied 186 low vision devices, 179 Braille writers, 54 refreshable Braille devices, 33 embossers and 10 large print keyboards. She noted all Braille technicians continued to provide formatted documents for accessibility on their devices, creating contextual graphics and embossed Braille. Lisa Yencarelli stated the Braille production staff had created 451 documents for use on devices and filled 1,487 requests for embossed Braille and tactile graphics. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the number of blind and visually students that were being served statewide. Lisa Yencarelli stated that 624 students were being served, although she did not have the number of PDSD students with visual impairments. Lisa Yencarelli stated she would obtain the accurate number and report to the council. Bob Kresmer stated the importance of accurate numbers when advocating for students. Ted Chittenden inquired whether ASDB had any difficulties with students paying attention to online learning. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB had difficulties with students logging into online learning, although she was unaware of students not paying attention. Bob Kresmer inquired whether there had been a reduction in teaching staff and whether ASDB continued to support teachers in virtual teaching. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB provided instruction in using online platforms and AT as well as a monthly technology call for teachers struggling to use the technology. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the teacher vacancies. Lisa Yencarelli stated there were 2 vacancies in northern Arizona and 1-2 in Phoenix.

GCBVI Committee Reports

Public Information Committee

Ted Chittenden stated the Public Information Committee had completed the GCBVI Annual Report, which was approved for submission at the Executive Committee meeting. Mr. Chittenden stated Lindsey Powers had sent a copy of the Annual Report as well as the council Facebook and EyeKnow.AZ statistics. Ted Chittenden stated that committee member, Dean Colston, had created a council Linked In page, which had received a lot of traffic and the committee would continue to interact with that page. Ted Chittenden

stated that his term with the council would end in December and David Steinmetz had agreed to take over as Chair of the Public Information Committee. Ted Chittenden stated he had learned a lot from his experience on the council, especially from former council member, Dan Martinez, and he enjoyed his time on the council.

AT Committee

Bea Shapiro stated the Assistive Technology (AT) provided a joint presentation with the Employment Committee at VRATE on virtual job interviewing using platforms such as Zoom, Google Meets, and Web Ex. Terri Hedgpeth stated the committees provided a great presentation in which about 122 individuals were present.

Ex-Oficio Member and Blindness Community Organization Updates

Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI)

Steve Tepper stated ACBVI opened for hybrid services in person and online via Zoom. Bob Kresmer inquired whether ACBVI was full staffed. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI was fully staffed. Terri Hedgpeth inquired regarding the number of clients ACBVI was serving. Steve Tepper stated he did not have that information, but he would share that information. Bob Kresmer inquired whether ACBVI was holding their annual fundraising event. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI was holding their end of the year fundraising campaign.

SAAVI Services for the Blind

Mike Gordon stated SAAVI continued to become a certified agency, which would offer a graduate certificate in O&M instruction. Mike Gordon stated 7-8 students were undergoing that training, which included immersion training and online certification. Mr. Gordon stated several staff were involved in immersion training currently. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI was currently serving approximately 75 students. Bob Kresmer inquired whether SAAVI was able to offer itinerant services in the rural areas. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI continued to perform assessments and to offer the same services virtually that were offered in-person previously.

Arizona Council of the Blind

Ted Chittenden stated the AzCB Board had decided that the State Conference would be held April 17, 2021 via Zoom. Mr. Chittenden stated the National American Council of the Blind (ACB) Conference would be held virtually at the end of July.

Agenda Items and Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the GCBVI Full Council will be on February 19, 2021 from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Call to the Public

Eve Sanchez thanked the council for allowing her to attend the meeting.

Adjournment of Meeting

Ted Chittenden moved to adjourn the meeting. Bea Shapiro seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:30.

As of September 30, 2020, the statistics are:

The total number of individuals in the VR program was 767
The total number of Veterans in VR Program was 25
The total number of individuals in the OOS was 0
The total number of individuals in Priority Two was 0
The total number of individuals in Priority Three was 0
The number of VR applications was 34
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 61
The median number of days application to eligibility was 25.5
The eligibility determination compliance within 60 days was 83.3%
The number of new plans written was 135
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 132.1
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 132.1
The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 71.9%
The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$76.92
The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$15.00
The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$32.77
The number of clients placed was 15
The number of clients closed successfully was 4

As of September 30, 2020, the Deaf Blind Population statistics:

The total number of individuals in the VR program was 41
The total number of Veterans in VR program was 1
The total number of individuals in the OOS was 0
The total number of individuals in Priority Two was 0
The total number of individuals in Priority Three was 0
The number of VR applications was 2
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 28.5
The median number of days from application to eligibility was 28.5
The eligibility determination compliance with 60 days was 100%
The number of new plans written was 7
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 100.5
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 100.5
The IPE Implementation Compliance within 90 days was 100%
The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was n/a
The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was n/a
The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was n/a
The number of clients placed was 0
The number of clients closed successfully was 0