

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

Full Council Meeting Minutes

February 17, 2023

Attendance

Members Present

Bob Kresmer
Amy Porterfield
John McCann
Andrew Cohen
Donald Porterfield
Nathan Pullen
Erin Pawlus
Mike Gordon
Brian Dulude
Steve Tepper
Annette Reichman
David Steinmetz

Members Absent

Ted Chittenden
Allan Curry
Jonathan Pringle

Staff Present

Lindsey Powers

Guests Present

Kristen Mackey
Eve Sanchez
Lisa Yencarelli
Joyceline Elliot
Jami Parente
Kathryn -ASL
April – ASL
Annette Satterlee – CART

Dan Martinez

Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions

Bob Kresmer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:32 p.m. Introductions were made, a quorum was present, and the procedural meeting rules were explained.

Approval of November 18, 2022 Meeting Minutes

John McCann moved to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2022 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 the council had been tracking recent Legislative action and would receive an update from the Legislative and Public Policy Committee.

GCBVI Annual Report

Bob Kresmer stated the council had previously agreed to submit the GCBVI Annual Report to the Governor's Office provided that no one had any objections. There were no comments from the council. Bob Kresmer stated the GCBVI Annual Report would be submitted to the Governor's Office.

RSA Administrator's Report

Kristen Mackey stated RSA was on track with the implementation of the new case management system and had evaluated over 4000 system requirements. Ms. Mackey stated the development of the system would take 2 years, and RSA would continue to work on any accessibility issues and testing. Kristen Mackey stated RSA had a vacancy rate of 20-22%, although the agency was able to hire several positions recently. Kristen Mackey stated the new DES Director, Angie Rodgers, had assumed her position at the end of January, and had been officially confirmed. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was in the process of establishing a vision statement, and staff had been

surveyed to indicate their preferred core values for the agency. Kristen Mackey stated the Assistive Technology (AT) and Independent Living program under the Northern State University was piloting a program that would expand service to provide AT to clients sooner. She noted the Federal grant would increase slightly, and RSA was seeking technical support for how to expend all Federal funds effectively. Ms. Mackey stated the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Spring Conference would focus on fiscal management and how VR agencies could use funds to serve clients. Kristen Mackey stated the VR numbers were down and would increase slightly when there was a decrease in COVID cases, and RSA was exploring marketing strategies while remaining mindful of the current staff vacancies. Amy Porterfield inquired whether the staff vacancies were higher in the Services for the Blind Visually Impaired and Deaf (SBVID). Kristen Mackey stated the SBVID staff vacancies were higher, which included supervisors and support staff.

SBVID Program Manager Report

Brian Dulude stated the Assistant Program Manager had been filled by Jami Parente, who was the former Policy Unit Manager as well as a VR supervisor and counselor. Jami Parente stated that she was excited to be in her new position and to work with the council. Brian Dulude stated the Transition Roadshow was held on January 9,10, and 12, in which SAAVI, Foundations for Blind Children (FBC), Blind Inc, the Colorado Center for the Blind attended. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the participation of individuals in the rural areas. Brian Dulude stated that schools in all areas were encouraged to attend, and the meetings were recorded for individuals that were unable to attend. Bob Kresmer suggested Brian Dulude work with ASDB teachers on sharing the recordings with their students as well. Amy Porterfield inquired regarding the flexibility of individuals referred to VR. Brian Dulude stated SBVID was flexible, while allowing counselors time to enter individuals into the system. Dr. Dulude noted the SBVID vacancy rate was high, although the program was in the process of hiring for several positions, while maintaining services to current clients.

BEP Program Update

Joyceline Elliot stated BEP had one new trainee and a consultant had been hired in December. Ms. Elliot stated that Adam Bevell was the new

Arizona Participating Operators Committee (APOC) Chair. She noted BEP had been awarded a 5-year contract with the National Guard, and was continuing to work on the contract with Fort Huachuca. Joyceline Elliot stated BEP had new sites with Smith Pipe and Steel, as well as sites with Mesa and Litchfield Park. Bob Kresmer inquired whether there were any updates regarding the Fort Huachuca contract. Joyceline Elliot stated BEP received the debrief from the Army and was currently working with an attorney regarding the next steps in negotiating the contract. Amy Porterfield inquired regarding the current BEP set-aside amount. Joyceline Elliot stated the BEP set-aside was 20% and the program was requesting the set-aside be reduced to 12-15% through the Legislature. Kristen Mackey stated the rule was reviewed every 5 years, and it had gone through the internal AG office within DES, and required approval from the Governor before moving forward. Brian Dulude added that the Starbucks café at the DES building had reopened and a food truck was also available for lunch.

Eve Sanchez stated that she was modifying the ILB wait list, and she would be able to share the numbers at the next meeting. Ms. Sanchez stated that ILB had started a new program, Essential Skills Jump Start, which invited anyone on the waitlist to receive classes while they waited for services. Mike Gordon stated that vendors continued to experience challenges when reporting services in Libera, which caused a delay in reimbursement and referrals. Donald Porterfield inquired whether SBVID would provide training to Jami Parente's on working with blind and visually impaired individuals. Brian Dulude stated Jami Parente had reached out to SAAVI recently regarding training and would meet with Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB) to gain a better understanding of the blindness population. He added that Ms. Parente had received questions regarding policies from BVI counselors and had worked on the BEP regulations previously. Jami Parente stated that she had also worked with ASDB and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHOH) population as well as the CVHL population. She noted that she would be meeting with different blindness agencies and looked forward to working with the individuals at those organizations. Bob Kresmer stated the council welcomed Jami Parente to work with the council. Amy Porterfield inquired regarding the SBVID vacancy rate, and if the council could assist in any way. Brian Dulude stated he did not have the exact vacancy rate numbers.

ASDB Report

Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB was holding a Job Fair that day and would hold another Job Fair next Friday. She noted that ASDB would be interviewing and hiring for several positions such as a Media Specialist, Accountant, Administrative positions, and teachers. Ms. Yencarelli ASDB would be holding the Arizona Braille challenge remotely, and would be applying for a grant through the Arizona DeafBlind Project. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the new Principal at the Tucson campus. Lisa Yencarelli stated the new Principal had been hired for the Tucson campus, and she hoped to invite her to attend a future council meeting.

GCBVI Committee Reports

Legislative and Public Policy Committee

Amy Porterfield stated Governor Hobbs created new positions, which included a Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) Director, a Civil Rights Director, a Human Services and a Health Services Director. Ms. Porterfield stated that she met with the DEI Director to discuss the lack of enforcement regarding website accessibility and how to strengthen those measures. Amy Porterfield stated they also talked about the procurement language when government agencies were procuring new software and applications. Amy Porterfield stated they also discussed the hiring practices and a lack of community representation as well as the requirement for individuals to have a driver's license in order to be considered for employment.

Amy Porterfield stated the committee was following SB 1328, which requested an update to the language surrounding the Braille code, the requirements for teachers and to allow them to pass a national test to be certified. She stated the committee was also following HB 2654, which would include an additional million in funding for the Independent Living Blind (ILB) program, although there had been no movement yet. Amy Porterfield stated HB 2231 restricted early mail in voting to a few categories, although it did not address an electronic voting option. Amy Porterfield stated that she would meet with the Department of Economic Security (DES) Director to discuss whether DES would be able to support ILB services with the potential increase in funding. Bob Kresmer stated the committee had discussed the ability for Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to provide services for individuals under 55. Amy Porterfield stated the consumer groups had

been advocating for additional funding for ILB services for individuals over 55. She noted that currently, there were no ILB services for individuals under 55, because those services were being provided by the Centers for Independent Living (CIL)s. Ms. Porterfield stated the committee had discussed whether RSA would be able to provide those services if there was an increase in funding, but the program would need to be rebuilt. Amy Porterfield stated some states were able to provide some ILB services, and she would explore any options that could be shared with RSA and DES. Eve Sanchez inquired whether any of the non-profit agencies were able to provide any ILB services to individuals under 55. Amy Porterfield stated that SAAVI Services for the Blind was able to provide some services in limited capacity. Steve Tepper noted the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI) was also able to provide individualized instruction and support groups for individuals under 55.

Amy Porterfield stated that SB 1402 would expand the scope of the Arizona State Schools of the Deaf and Blind (ASDB) to include other disabilities. Annette Reichman stated that SB 1402 would support any student under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which would include students with disabilities such as autism, behavioral health, or developmental disabilities, and would change the scope of ASDB. Annette Reichman stated the bill had passed 7-4 in favor for the bill, and it would likely pass out of committee. Ms. Reichman stated that ASDB representatives would go the Senate for the vote, although a date had not been scheduled yet. She noted the school needed to make the case that it would be quite expensive to increase the scope of the school. Donald Porterfield inquired whether the ASDB constitution included any mandates that would restrict services to students that were blind, visually impaired or had combined vision and hearing loss (CVHL). Annette Reichman stated the Attorney General was currently reviewing the ASDB constitution regarding that. Bob Kresmer stated the council would continue to track to movement of the bill and would reach out to other organizations for support as necessary.

DeafBlind Committee

Bob Kresmer stated the DeafBlind Committee had previously discussed potentially holding a Town Hall meeting to reach out to the community, although that would not likely occur until the Fall.

Ex-Officio Member and Blindness Community Organization Updates

Arizona Talking Book Library

Erin Pawlus stated the Bureau of Engraving and Printing had a program that was offering currency readers, the ibill, to eligible individuals. Ms. Pawlus stated that libraries were also able to provide ibills to individuals interested, or to help individuals complete the application. Erin Pawlus stated any organizations interested in offering the ibills should contact Tracy Garrett. Erin Pawlus stated the library was also preparing for the upcoming Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE) in March. Erin Pawlus stated the National Library Service (NLS) continued to offer Braille on demand, in which individuals could request up to 5 hard copies of books and were able to keep the books.

Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Steve Tepper stated ACBVI began construction on a new health center, which should be complete on May 1st. He noted there was a case manager on site, who could assist clients with the full spectrum of their services. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI would also be building housing for individuals in 2024 or 2025.

SAAVI Services for the Blind

Mike Gordon stated SAAVI was offering the Ability Builds Confidence (ABC) program for individuals waiting for VR services. Mr. Gordon noted SAAVI had implemented some Life Courses for seniors and the Answers class. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI recently offered 4–5-day retreats for skill building. He added the organization had a couple of interns from the University of Arizona and were participating in several classes and learning. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI continued with the accreditation process and was waiting for the site visit.

National Federation of the Blind of Arizona

Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA Phoenix seminar was held in January, which included email campaigns regarding Braille education and certification, accessible absentee and voting, and the additional funding for the ILB program. Donald Porterfield stated NFBA members went to Washington DC at the end of January and met with Representatives to discuss accessible

medical devices, website and software accessibility, and the need for simplified language for individuals receiving Social Security income so that individuals did not lose benefits if they went over earnings by 1 dollar. Mr. Porterfield stated the NFBA state scholarship deadline was May 31st and the national scholarship deadline was March 31st. He noted the NFBA National Conference would be held in Houston July 1-6.

Arizona Council of the Blind

John McCann stated the AzCB was planning the March AzCB National Conference, which would be held via Zoom. John McCann stated the Legislative seminar would be held March 9-13 in person.

Agenda Items and Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the GCBVI Full Council will be on May 19, 2023 from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Call to the Public

Dan Martinez stated the Information and Referral information was now online through EyeKnowAZ, although the vendors included on the website needed to update their information. Dan Martinez stated he was also concerned with the ILB services to individuals under 55 and noted the CILs were not providing adequate services to that population. Bob Kresmer stated the council had discussed the need for services for individuals under 55 that were not seeking employment. Amy Porterfield stated that ILB could potentially receive additional funding for individuals over 55, although the council could explore options for providing services to individuals under 55 as well.

Adjournment of Meeting

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

Statistics

As of December 30, 2022, the statistics are:

The total number of individuals in VR was 1894
The total number of veterans in the VR program were 40
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 48
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 59
The median number of days from application to eligibility was 35
The eligibility compliance was 74%
The number of new plans written was 210
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 104.6
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 78.5
The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 71%
The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$41.00
The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$13.75
The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes was \$26.54
The number of clients placed in employment was 16
The number of clients closed successfully in employment was 8

As of December 30, 2022, the Deaf Blind Population statistics:

The total number of individuals in VR was 124
The total number of veterans in VR program was 2
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 2
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 101
The median number of days from application to eligibility was 101
The eligibility compliance was 100%
The number of new plans written was 19
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 169.75
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 77.75
The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 80%
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 in employment was 1
The number of clients closed successfully was 0