

Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI)
Full Council Meeting Minutes
February 19, 2021

Members Present

Bob Kresmer
Amy Porterfield
Ted Chittenden
David Steinmetz
Mike Gordon
Bea Shapiro
Nathan Pullen
Donald Porterfield
Brian Dulude
Janet Fisher
Annette Reichman

Members Absent

Michael Bailey
Allan Curry

Staff Present

Lindsey Powers

Guests Present

Lisa Yencarelli
Steve Tepper
John McCann
Sue Kay Kneifel
Colin Wong
Carlos Grandela
Elizabeth Navarette

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 November 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Ted Chittenden moved to approve the minutes of the November 20, 2020 GCBVI Full Council meeting as written. Amy Porterfield seconded the motion. Ted Chittenden noted the minutes indicated that Donald Porterfield was listed as present and absent and requested a correction. The corrected 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.

Council Membership Discussion

Bob Kresmer stated that Terri Hedgpeth had resigned from the GCBVI effective immediately due to health concerns and George Martinez had decided not to apply for reappointment to the council. Mr. Kresmer stated that Ted Chittenden had decided to remain on the council and had agreed to be the Chair of the Independent Living (IL) Committee. Bob Kresmer stated the Executive Committee would meet to discuss filling the Vice Chair position.

Bob Kresmer stated the Executive Committee recommended that Steve Tepper and John McCann's applications for council membership be forwarded to the Governor's Office of Boards and Commissions for appointment.

Steve Tepper stated he had been with ACBVI for 5 months and had 20 years of executive level experience in non-profit organizations. Ted Chittenden motioned that Steve Tepper's application be forwarded to the Office of Boards and Commissions for appointment. Bea Shapiro seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Bob Kresmer stated that John McCann had also applied for council membership as an AzCB representative. John McCann stated he had been a member of the American Council of the Blind in Virginia since 1981 and served on the Board. Mr. McCann stated he was a state agency director in Virginia and had a passion for Legislation related to blindness. Ted Chittenden motioned that John McCann's application be forwarded to the Office of Boards and Commission for appointment. Bea Shapiro seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Effects of Pandemic on Students and Adults

This item was tabled.

RSA Administrator's Report

Brian Dulude stated RSA continued to modernize Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) processes and there was no timeline for staff to return to the office. Mr. Dulude noted that when staff did return to the office, not all staff members would return at the same time. He stated that most staff would continue to work remotely and would meet with clients in the office or in the community as needed. Brian Dulude stated RSA continued to evaluate the value streams, which were the processes that clients moved through and whether processes could be streamlined to reduce the burden to clients and staff. Brian Dulude stated RSA would move to another case management system and had developed the scope and was evaluating the business requirements of a new system. Brian Dulude stated RSA still had approximately 20-40% fewer individuals in the VR program compared to the previous year. Brian Dulude stated through January, there were 1,077 job placements and 796 clients exited with employment. Brian Dulude stated RSA received a 13.25% response rate to the Client Satisfaction Surveys, in which 368 clients with open cases and 136 clients with closed cases responded to the survey. He noted that 55% responded favorably with open cases and 45.5% responded positively with closed cases, although clients still reported a lack of timeliness in receiving services and concern with being treated with courtesy and respect.

SBVID Program Manager Report

Brian Dulude stated there were 5 rehabilitation teachers in the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program, who were providing services virtually. Brian Dulude stated RSA was working with HR to adjust the scope of the OIB Program Manager position to ensure the salary was commensurate with the job duties. Mr. Dulude stated there were 111 clients on the wait list for 180 services, such as rehabilitation teaching, Orientation

and Mobility (O&M), Assistive Technology (AT) Training, and Adjust and Orientation to Disability. Brian Dulude stated he continued to meet monthly with SAAVI Services for the Blind and the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired regarding the services provided to clients. Ted Chittenden inquired who was handling the OIB Program Manager's job duties until that position was filled. Brian Dulude stated he was handling most of the administrative job duties of the Program Manager's position. Ted Chittenden inquired whether RSA also worked with the Foundation for Blind Children (FBC) to provide services to OIB clients. Brian Dulude stated RSA had a contract with FBC related to the comprehensive blindness program and did not currently have a contract for providing services to OIB clients. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the end date for the comprehensive services contract. Brian Dulude stated his understanding that the comprehensive services contract would end in 2022. David Steinmetz inquired when the contract with the case management system, Libera would end. Brian Dulude stated the contract would end this year, and RSA had received a two-year extension. David Steinmetz inquired whether OIB clients were being supported by the 5 rehabilitation teachers. Brian Dulude stated OIB clients were being served by current staff and vendors. Bob Kresmer inquired whether RSA would seek additional employees to work in OIB. Brian Dulude stated he would like to fill the O&M instructor and the AT instructor positions.

Brian Dulude stated the total number of individuals in VR at the end of December 2019 was 839 and was 807 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated in 2019, there were 30 veterans and 26 in 2020. Mr. Dulude stated the number of VR applications was 34 in 2019 and 74 in 2020. He noted the average number of days from application to eligibility in 2019 was 59.6 and was 52.9 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the eligibility determination compliance within 60 days was 71.7% in 2019 and 82.7% in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the number of plans written in 2019 was 49 and 287 in 2020. He stated the average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 127 in 2019 and 159 in 2020. He added the highest hourly wage in 2019 was \$16.17 and \$27.22 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated 14 clients were placed in 2019 and 27 were placed in 2020. Brian Dulude stated 17 clients were placed successfully in 2019 and 14 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 2 in 2019 and 4 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the average number of days from application to eligibility in 2019 was 56 and 48 in 2020. He noted the eligibility compliance determination was 100% in 2019 and 75% in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 126 in 2019 and 118 in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the

compliance within 90 days was 100% in 2019 and 75% in 2020. He stated 1 individual was placed in employment in 2019 and 0 individuals were placed in 2020. Brian Dulude stated the number of clients closed with employment in 2019 was 0 and 1 in 2020. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) operators were able to re-open. Brian Dulude stated that most operators were waiting until they could have a successful re-opening of their businesses.

BEP Program Update

Nathan Pullen stated that he would share of the highlights from the RSA 15 Report, which was from October 1, 2019-September 30, 2020. Nathan Pullen stated the gross sales were \$15,3000,000.00, merchandise purchases were just under 3.8 million, gross profit was 11.5 million and payroll expenses were 5.8 million. Mr. Pullen stated the other expenses were 1.3 million, total expenses were 7.2 million, operating profit was 4.3 million, vending machine and other income was \$489,000, retirement and other benefits paid was \$319,000, which created net proceeds of 5.72 million. Nathan Pullen stated the set aside funds were \$991,000, a net profit to vendors of 4.7 million, vendor earnings of 4.7 million, vendor person years of employment was 25.17, average vendor earnings was \$188,000, and median vendor earnings were just under \$40,000. Nathan Pullen stated BEP operators had 169 employees of which 27 had non-visual disabilities. He noted there were 6 facilities on Federal property, which included 2 postal, 2 defense and 2 military dining facilities. Nathan Pullen stated there were 4 vendors on Federal property, 23 facilities on private property, and 22 vendors on public property. Nathan Pullen stated there were 3 rest area locations with net proceeds of \$21,300. Nathan Pullen stated the program expenditures included purchases of new equipment of 1.26 million, maintenance and repair of \$217,000, replacement of new equipment of \$828,000, \$27,000 was refurbished, 1.46 million was management services, retirement and pension was just under \$13,000, and \$64,000 in health insurance and \$3300 in initial inventory for a total of 4.821 million in which 3.77 was from Federal funds and 1.73 was from set aside funds. Nathan Pullen stated the expenditure of program funds included a set aside fund of \$818,000 and an addition of 1.04 million, expended 1.7 million and had an end of year carry forward of \$129,000. Mr. Pullen stated there 27 site surveys, in which 23 were accepted and 4 were declined as non-feasible. He stated 3 licensed vendors completed their training, 23 vendors were provided upward mobility training, 4 vendors attended training or national conferences, there were 13 agency personnel of which 3 were business consultants. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the Federal or State reports required a breakdown by race, gender, ethnicity, or disability. Nathan Pullen stated he was only required to report employment of individuals employed

by the vendors, and whether they had visual or non-visual disabilities. Bob Kresmer inquired whether that information would be useful when providing information in advocating for the BEP program with the Legislature. Nathan Pullen stated he would have some of that information but would need to collect the rest of the information in a way that would not discriminate based on the information received. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the Federal funds received and how they affected the operators. Nathan Pullen stated the FRRP, which would be a Federal allocation of approximately 20 million based on the number of BEP operators would be distributed to operators, although BEP vendors had not received those funds yet.

ASDB Report

Lisa Yencarelli stated that students were able to return to both campuses on February 2nd. Ms. Yencarelli stated families were given the choice of returning to campus or remaining online. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB was in the process of developing a way for students to take state tests remotely. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB hired a new Statewide Director of Itinerant Services, Jay Johnson, who assisted the school in combining some of the smaller regional co-operatives. Lisa Yencarelli stated the Southwest, Eastern Highlands and the Northcentral Regional co-operatives had been combined into Region 1. Lisa Yencarelli stated the Desert Valley Regional Co-operative was now part of Region 2, and Southeast Regional Co-operative was part of Region 3. Lisa Yencarelli stated the agency continued with development of the Strategic Plan and to discuss the pillars of the plan.

GCBVI Committee Reports

Legislative and Public Policy Committee

Amy Porterfield stated the committee had been working with the National Federation of the Blind of Arizona (NFBA) to include a budget line item of and additional \$500,000 for Independent Living Blind (ILB) services. Ms. Porterfield stated the line item was added as a bill and the council would need to affirm that the Governor would not oppose that bill to continue advocacy for that bill. David Steinmetz inquired regarding the current budget line-item amount. Amy Porterfield stated her understanding that the current budget amount was approximately 1.2 million and the additional funding would be the same amount that was allocated in 2008 but was swept and never returned.

Amy Porterfield stated the council had also developed a COVID Vaccine Workgroup, that received updates from a Task Force and shared that information with the workgroup members, so the information could be

disseminated widely. Amy Porterfield stated the biggest challenge currently was that there were not enough vaccinations. Ms. Porterfield stated that individuals working in the field of blindness as educators or in rehabilitation were considered as educators and were eligible to receive the vaccinations as Priority 1B. Amy Porterfield stated the Task Force had been working with the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) to ensure the Vaccination Finder was accessible on their website. She noted the website currently worked best with Google Chrome. Amy Porterfield stated ADHS made changes to their portal to make it more accessible, although there were still issues with the application page for individuals using JAWS. Amy Porterfield stated the council Facebook page had posted information regarding the phone numbers for each county for individuals to receive assistance to schedule appointments for vaccinations. Amy Porterfield stated the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) was trying to secure transportation contracts for Medicaid eligible individuals to receive transportation to vaccination appointments. She noted that many insurance companies, such as Humana, were providing transportation as part of an individual's benefits. Amy Porterfield stated that Uber and Lyft were offering free rides to individuals, and the consumer groups were working with those companies to obtain coupon codes. Amy Porterfield stated that Steve Tepper had suggested holding a Town Hall meeting with the ADHS to receive updates regarding vaccinations, the priority system, and different ways to obtain transportation. Amy Porterfield stated the Town Hall meeting had been scheduled for March 5th and she would be sending a Zoom link to that meeting to be distributed widely to the community.

AT Committee

Bea Shapiro stated the Assistive Technology (AT) Committee was planning a virtual training for Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired Students (TVI) regarding AT used in schools. Ms. Shapiro stated that virtual instruction would likely remain, and the committee would identify topics that would benefit teachers that were providing instruction remotely.

Public Information Committee

David Steinmetz stated he had taken over as Chair of the Public Information Committee but had to reschedule the January meeting for March. David Steinmetz stated the committee had published updates from the COVID Vaccination Workgroup on the GCBVI Facebook and Linked In pages and would continue to post any further updates.

Ex-Oficio Member and Blindness Community Organization Updates

Arizona Talking Book Library

Janet Fisher stated the library continued to get library materials out to patrons. Ms. Fisher stated the library continued to move forward with the multi-cartridge program, which allowed the library to put more books or series onto the cartridges. Janet Fisher stated that Karen Keninger, National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, would be retiring, although no successor had been chosen. Janet Fisher stated that books were being shared as part of the Marrakesh Treaty. Ms. Fisher noted some individuals were experiencing problems downloading books on BARD after some of the updates, and they were welcome to contact the library for assistance. Janet Fisher stated the BARD changes did allow items to be downloaded from the cloud, which was faster. Ted Chittenden stated that Ms. Keninger was trying to get reading Braille displays to library patrons and inquired whether that would continue. Janet Fisher stated that pilot program continued to move forward.

Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI)

Steve Tepper stated ACBVI recently hired a new O&M specialist and was in the process of finalizing hiring for an individual to work in the Combined Vision and Hearing Loss (CVHL) department. Mr. Tepper stated ACBVI received a second Federal grant and had started a new class teaching individual how to use the Amazon Echo. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI also received a grant to assist individuals to receive the vaccination. Bob Kresmer inquired whether ACBVI was serving individuals in person. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI was serving individuals in person when staff and clients were able to while still adhering to safety procedures. Bob Kresmer inquired whether ACBVI had sufficient staff to serve OIB clients. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI had committed to serving 7 clients and would take on more when the agency had more staff.

National Federation of the Blind of Arizona

Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA held their Phoenix Seminar January 25th and 26th and continued to meet with the Legislature. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA was advocating for the additional funding for ILB services, which had not received any opposition thus far. Mr. Porterfield stated the organization was also advocating for a Braille certification bill, which passed through the Senate and House Education Committees the previous year, although had been put on hold due to the pandemic. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA was also seeking to ensure that mail in ballots were accessible, which had been put on hold due to the controversy surrounding the previous elections. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA also attended the

Washington Seminar sessions in February and continued to meet with Senators. Donald Porterfield stated the organization was working with the Legislature regarding the Affordable Technology Act, which would create a \$2,000 refundable tax credit that would purchase technology for 3 years, such as screen reading software. Mr. Porterfield stated the organization was also advocating for the Medical Device Non-Visual Access Act, which would cover all medical devices such as thermometers to dialysis machines. Donald Porterfield noted organization was also working with the Legislation on the 21st Century Mobile Application and Website Accessibility Act and was requesting rules that would mandate accessibility on website and mobile applications. Donald Porterfield stated the organization was also advocating for the ADA Voting Act, which would make all voting terminals accessible. Donald Porterfield stated the NFB National Conference would be held virtually as well as the State Conference, which would be scheduled for the Thursday-Sunday of Labor Day weekend. Ted Chittenden inquired whether there was an increase in voting fraud for individuals submitting their ballots though the mail. Donald Porterfield stated he was not aware of increased voting fraud among blind and visually impaired individuals, although the NFBA continued to seek accessible voting at the Federal level.

SAAVI Services for the Blind

Mike Gordon stated SAAVI continued to pursue certification instruction discovery, in which 9 staff members were pursuing certificates in O&M, IL or AT and would begin internships within the agency. Mike Gordon stated the agency tried to open several times, although staff or clients reported possible COVID infection, and the agency had to close again. Mr. Gordon stated the agency was able to loan equipment to students waiting for authorized technology and revenue was down but was not troubling. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI received Federal loans, although the agency did have to reduce staff. Mike Gordon stated the agency was providing additional training to staff and supervisors and hoped to perform recruitment to target younger individuals. Mike Gordon stated the agency received 3 vehicles and had hired a consultant to assist the fundraising team. Bob Kresmer inquired whether SAAVI would need to hire additional staff to provide services to OIB clients. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI had to downsize the Yuma office, although the agency was able to provide services virtually statewide. Mr. Gordon stated the agency would likely rehire individuals or bring individuals off furlough if needed. Brian Dulude expressed his gratitude to SAAVI and ACBVI for providing services to OIB clients. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI originally had plans to offer training in rural areas with RSA staff, which could potentially be revisited.

Arizona Industries for the Blind

David Steinmetz stated AIB had more business opportunities such as creating a new base supply center, or retail supply environment where AIB could support military and Federal agencies at Fort Huachuca. David Steinmetz stated AIB was working with a commercial company and would provide the warehouse and distribution to the company, which would double AIB's headcount. Mr. Steinmetz stated AIB would need to expand to the western or eastern valley. He noted AIB also had business opportunities in manufacturing, sewing, and distribution of medical products. David Steinmetz stated AIB would be filling some management, Accounting, and direct labor positions. Bob Kresmer inquired how AIB was taking measures to keep employees safe during the pandemic. David Steinmetz stated had set up barriers between workstations and common areas and allowed a reduced number of staff in the breakroom. Ted Chittenden inquired whether David Steinmetz could distribute any job announcements to the council. David Steinmetz stated he would make sure the council received any AIB job announcements.

Arizona Council of the Blind

Ted Chittenden stated the AzCB State Conference would be held April 16th and 17th via Zoom, and the first day would include reports and the second day would include in house activities. Mr. Chittenden stated the National American Council of the Blind (ACB) Conference would be held virtually at the end of July. Ted Chittenden stated the ACB focus would be on ensuring that social security pay for assistance for blind individuals such as providing canes or high technology for individuals losing their vision.

Agenda Items and Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the GCBVI Full Council will be on May 21, 2021 from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm.

Announcements

David Steinmetz announced the Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE) would be held virtually on November 19th. This would be the 25th Anniversary of VRATE, and the Board would be reaching out to the community regarding previous expos to observe the theme of "Reflection".

Call to the Public

Carlos Grandela from Low Vision stated that he would be pleased to participate on one of the council's committees.

Adjournment of Meeting

Bea Shapiro moved to adjourn the meeting. David Steinmetz seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:03.

As of December 31, 2020, the statistics are:

The total number of individuals in the VR program was 807
The total number of Veterans in VR Program was 26
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 74
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 52.9
The median number of days application to eligibility was 33
The eligibility determination compliance within 60 days was 82.7%
The number of new plans written was 287
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 159.2
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 149
The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 59.7%
The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$76.92
The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$12.00
The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$27.22
The number of clients placed was 27
The number of clients closed successfully was 14

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 4
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 48.3
The median number of days from application to eligibility was 58
The eligibility determination compliance with 60 days was 75%
The number of new plans written was 15
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 118.3
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 114.5
The IPE Implementation Compliance within 90 days was 75%
The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$17.00
The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$17.00
The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$17.00
The number of clients placed was 0
The number of clients closed successfully was 1