

**Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI)**  
**Full Council Meeting Minutes**  
August 20, 2021

**Members Present**

Bob Kresmer  
Amy Porterfield  
Ted Chittenden  
Bea Shapiro  
Nathan Pullen  
David Steinmetz  
Brian Dulude  
Mike Gordon  
Donald Porterfield  
Janet Fisher  
Annette Reichman  
Steve Tepper  
John McCann  
Andrew Cohen  
Jonathan Pringle  
Terri Hedgpeth

**Members Absent**

Michael Bailey  
Allan Curry

**Staff Present**

Lindsey Powers

**Guests Present**

Kristen Mackey  
Doris Woltman  
EvaMarie Sanchez  
Sue Kay Kneifel  
Candis Gingras  
Bradley Leprintess

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**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 May 21, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Ted Chittenden moved to approve the minutes of the May 21, 2021 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 would receive an update regarding additional funding for the Independent Living Blind (ILB) and the council's communication with the Governor's Office surrounding that issue. Bob Kresmer stated he had been active in several of the committees and workgroups. Mr. Kresmer noted the council would be participating in the upcoming Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE) and members would receive an update regarding those activities.

## **Council Membership Discussion**

Bob Kresmer stated the Governor's Office of Boards and Commissions had recently appointed Jonathan Pringle and Andrew Cohen as members of the GCBVI and he welcomed them to the council. Jonathan Pringle stated he had worked with Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and was now working with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) as a DeafBlind Specialist and his focus was on employment services and access to the community. Andrew Cohen stated that he was a deafblind individual, and his goal was for the deafblind community to have a voice and to not be marginalized or excluded. Bob Kresmer reminded council members to speak slowly to allow the ASL interpreters time to communicate. David Steinmetz welcomed Terri Hedgpeth back to the council.

## **GCBVI Annual Report Discussion**

David Steinmetz stated the Public Information Committee was requesting committee reports from all Chairs and he still needed reports from the Education, Employment, Public Policy and Legislative Committees as well as a SBVID report. Bob Kresmer stated that he would resend his Chair report to Mr. Steinmetz. Ted Chittenden stated that Dean Colston had recently resigned from the Public Information Committee, therefore Mr. Chittenden would be assisting in the development of the Annual Report.

## **RSA Administrator's Report**

Kristen Mackey stated RSA staff continued to work remotely, although individuals could go into the offices as needed or if they choose to. Ms. Mackey noted that staff could meet clients out in the community if needed and were generally not creating a lot of foot traffic in offices. Kristen Mackey stated there was about a slight increase in VR referrals, although the number of open cases was lower by about 5%. Kristen Mackey stated there was a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new case management system, which would end in October. She noted that RSA was keeping the same goals of job placements and exits with employment as the previous year. Kristen Mackey stated the agency held the Voice of the Customer focus groups, in which individuals indicated slow staff responsiveness and service timeliness, although clients expressed that their counselors were dedicated and supportive. Ms. Mackey stated there were no changes to the Federal grant award and not expected changed to the State grant award. Kristen Mackey stated there were discussions surrounding potential waivers for agencies struggling to expend all funds due to the pandemic.

Kristen Mackey stated RSA submitted a new State Plan every 4 years and was required to update the plan every 2 years. She noted that RSA would be report any major economic shifts or any changes required to provide services, which did not include changes to services due to the pandemic. Ms. Mackey stated there would be a public comment period, and she would share that information with the council once it became available. Kristen Mackey stated RSA had sent Client Satisfaction Surveys for 1 year with the new questions and had sent 1900 surveys and received approximately 257 responses. She noted the greatest opportunity for improvement was the timeliness of services and the greatest accomplishment was that clients felt they were treated with courtesy and respect. Kristen Mackey stated the new case management system would focus on streamlining the process of providing services to clients and would include a client and vendor portal to assist in data gathering. Ted Chittenden inquired whether the new case management system would be accessible to blind and visually impaired staff and vendors. Kristen Mackey stated that one of the requirements of the new case management system was that it was accessible and able to be modified to ensure accessibility for staff and vendors. Bob Kresmer inquired whether some of the staff position descriptions had been updated to allow for higher salaries. Kristen Mackey stated the Department of Economic Security (DES) was able to offer a pay increase to counselors, Rehabilitation Instructors, and Rehabilitation Technicians (RT)s, although the position descriptions to increase the grade had not been updated yet. Amy Porterfield inquired regarding the base pay for a Rehabilitation Instructor. Brian Dulude stated the base pay for a Rehabilitation Instructor was approximately \$37,000 and

with the increase was about \$41,000. David Steinmetz inquired whether the State Plan would focus on competitive integrated employment. Kristen Mackey stated RSA would continue to support competitive integrated employment. Mr. Steinmetz inquired whether counselors were able to evaluate jobs on an individual basis. Kristen Mackey stated VR encouraged counselors to evaluate whether the jobs offered a commensurate wage and opportunities for advancement. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the progress of the Federal audit review. Kristen Mackey stated the Federal report had been delayed, although the agency was working on the current corrective action plan. Ms. Mackey noted that RSA was working to increase the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) compliance rate and she hoped to make those corrections within 30-60 days. Bob Kresmer welcomed EvaMarie Sanchez to the council meeting and offered her a chance to speak. EvaMarie Sanchez stated she had been a Rehabilitation Instructional Specialists for about 4 years and was excited to continue the work of the program. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the accommodations for Spanish speaking ILB clients or deaf or hard of hearing clients. EvaMarie Sanchez stated the program utilized the translation services available and had not lost any clients due to language barriers.

### **SBVID Program Manager Report**

Brian Dulude provided the SBVID report for the end of June 2020 compared to the end of June 2021:

The total number of individuals in VR for 2020 was 976

The total number of individuals in VR for 2021 and was 880

The number of veterans for 2020 was 31

The number of veterans for 2021 was 7

The number of individuals on the Order of Selection was 0

The total number of applicants for the VR Program for 2020 was 176

The total number of applicants for the VR Program for 2021 was 153

The average number of days from application to eligibility for 2020 was 49.6

The average number of days from application to eligibility for 2021 was 47.1

The eligibility compliance for 2020 was 85.6

The eligibility compliance for 2021 was 85.9

The number of new plans written for 2020 was 870

The number of new plans written for 2021 was 662

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation for 2020 was 129.9

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation for 2021 was 127.3

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days for 2020 was 54.4%

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days for 2021 was 70.9%

The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes for 2020 was \$19.24

The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes for 2021 was \$22.84

The number of clients placed in 2020 was 52

The number of clients placed in 2021 was 60

The number of clients closed successfully in 2020 was 61

The number of clients closed successfully in 2021 was 39

Brian Dulude provided the report for Deaf-Blind services for the end of June 2020 compared to the end of June 2021:

The total number of individuals in VR for 2020 was 48

The total number of individuals in VR for 2021 and was 46

The number of veterans for 2020 was 1

The number of veterans for 2021 was 1

The total number of applicants for the VR Program for 2020 was 7

The total number of applicants for the VR Program for 2021 was 8

The average number of days from application to eligibility for 2020 was 44.8

The average number of days from application to eligibility for 2021 was 44.8

The eligibility compliance for 2020 was 100%

The eligibility compliance for 2021 was 87.5%

The number of new plans written for 2020 was 24

The number of new plans written for 2021 was 26

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation for 2020 was 120

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation for 2021 was 97.6

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days for 2020 was 66.7%

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days for 2021 was 85.7%

The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes for 2020 was \$18.85

The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes for 2021 was \$17.00

The number of clients placed in 2020 was 1

The number of clients placed in 2021 was 3

The number of clients closed successfully in 2020 was 2

The number of clients closed successfully in 2021 was 1

Ted Chittenden inquired whether the number of case closures decreasing was due to individuals obtaining employment later in the year. Brian Dulude stated that many individuals chose to postpone employment or in person training due to the pandemic. Terri Hedgpeth stated she would be interested in comparing the same statistics from June 2019, which would be a more

accurate portrayal of VR services. Brian Dulude stated he could request that information from the Data Unit. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the current staff vacancies. Brian Dulude stated SBVID had recently filled the ILB Program Manager position as well as a Purchasing Technician and a Rehabilitation Technician. Mr. Dulude stated SBVID would be hiring Orientation and Mobility (O&M) and Assistive Technology (AT) instructors and a Rehabilitation Instructor. He noted the Supervisor position for Northern Arizona was also vacant as well as 3 counselor positions. David Steinmetz inquired whether the decrease in new plans written was due to a staff shortage. Brian Dulude stated the decrease could be due to a staff shortage as well as a decrease in VR applications compared to the previous year. Brian Dulude stated that clients obtained employment with organizations and businesses such as the Arizona Department of Administration, All Health, Sears Holding Company, Amazon, the Arizona Autism, Fed Ex, the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Pima County Attorney's Office. He noted the NFB Newslines would continue to be funded through 2023.

Brian Dulude stated there were 189 individuals on the ILB wait list, which represented approximately 337 services, and 131 clients had received all requested services. Mr. Dulude stated the average service assignment per month was about 19 services and the average number of clients requesting services was about 23. Brian Dulude stated the ILB unit would continue to meet with vendors monthly to determine their capacity to provide services and would hire staff to assist with providing services in house as well. Brian Dulude noted the ILB unit was experiencing an increase in calls, which could be partly due to increased information from Mississippi State University. Bob Kresmer stated he received calls from individuals indicating that they heard about the program through the radio. Ted Chittenden stated that he was contacted by Gail Wilt, Arizona Council of the Blind (AzCB) representative indicating that there had not been an Introduction to Blindness Workshop since June and inquired whether they were still being scheduled. Brian Dulude stated his understanding that the workshops were still being scheduled and that various consumer groups and vendors were invited to present. Sue Kay Kneifel stated that she would add Ms. Wilt's email contact to the invitation list. Janet Fisher stated the Arizona Talking Book Library joined in the subscription to the NFB Newslines and noted the Library and DES had agreed to a 5-year agreement, in which there was 1 more year of that agreement.

## **BEP Program Update**

Nathan Pullen stated that BEP was still heavily impacted from the pandemic, and most food service locations remained closed, although some locations were getting closer to opening potentially in October. Mr. Pullen stated those locations were hoping to participate in a program with the city of Phoenix that would use funds to support meals for the homeless. Nathan Pullen stated that a new coffee shop would open tentatively in October in the Chandler Library. He noted that BEP was developing a proposal for the Marana Base, which would provide an income for an operator. Nathan Pullen stated all the prison operators were able to provide services to the administrative offices, although the visitation areas remained closed, and operators were performing maintenance of equipment in preparation for when those areas opened. Nathan Pullen stated there were a couple of candidates for the BEP program, and they would be eligible for the screening process. Bob Kresmer inquired whether there had been any changes to the emergency orders from the Governor's Office. Nathan Pullen stated the Governor's Office had not fully retracted those orders, and BEP was considering options for providing similar services such as an operator running a hot dog stand on weekends. Nathan Pullen stated that as of June, BEP had provided all the support for operators to support their businesses. He noted BEP processed payments totaling a little over \$608,000 in 2020 and \$138,000 in 2021 and dispersed 20 million in FRP funds across all Randolph Sheppard programs. Bob Kresmer stated his understanding that Arizona's BEP program was a national example to other states. Nathan Pullen stated BEP did have a higher set aside for the purpose of using when needed, and the program was fortunate to have those funds available to operators.

## **ASDB Report**

Lisa Yencarelli stated that school started on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and the total number of students from August 1<sup>st</sup> statewide was 2078 compared to May of 2021, which was 2205. Ms. Yencarelli stated that ASDB would typically enroll more students as the school year progressed. Lisa Yencarelli stated there were 107 students on the Tucson campus, 245 on the Phoenix campus, 447 in the Preschool-kindergarten campuses, 1087 in the statewide itinerant programs, and 544 in the Birth-3 years old. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB had received several referrals for blind and visually impaired students and the Tucson campus would likely open a new classroom for students with visual impairments. Lisa Yencarelli stated the students were being served in person and there was no virtual option currently. She noted ASDB was working on strengthening the connection with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to ensure that teachers had more knowledge of VR and how students could become

eligible for services. Bob Kresmer inquired whether Ms. Yencarelli had a breakdown of the number of blind and visually impaired students. Lisa Yencarelli stated she had the number of blind and visually impaired students, although they would not be separated out according to disability. She noted that on the Tucson campus, there were 5 students with visual impairments, and there were 7 students with multiple disabilities, although she could tease out the numbers of blind and visually impaired students. Bob Kresmer inquired whether Lisa Jackson was still tracking that information for ASDB. Annette Reichman stated Lisa Jackson was currently working part time for ASDB. Ted Chittenden inquired whether ASDB had any mask requirements for students and teachers. Lisa Yencarelli stated that masks were not mandated, although ASDB was encouraging everyone to wear masks inside. Bob Kresmer inquired whether ASDB had any statistics regarding the number of staff that received the COVID vaccine. Annette Reichman stated ASDB was collecting that information voluntarily from staff that were willing to provide that information. Terri Hedgpeth inquired whether masks would make communication difficult for deaf students or students that were hard of hearing. Annette Reichman stated that students could use the masks that were plastic and see through.

## **GCBVI Committee Reports**

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

Amy Porterfield stated the committee had not met recently and she would like to invite all council members to attend the next meeting and offer any suggestions for future activities of the committee. Bob Kresmer stated his understanding that the potential increase in ILB funding was not added to the Governor's budget. Amy Porterfield stated it had not been added back into the Governor's budget, although the goal was to begin meeting with the Governor's Policy Advisor to begin that conversation. Jonathan Pringle inquired whether individuals from the public would be able to attend that meeting as well. Amy Porterfield stated she wanted to invite all council members to attend, although all council meetings were open to the public to attend.

### ***AT Committee***

Bea Shapiro stated the Assistive Technology (AT) Committee had recorded the first podcast, *AT in the Desert*, which was developed to reach out to the community and provide information regarding AT. Bea Shapiro stated the first podcast was focused on the Talking Book Library and the second podcast would provide instructions for accessing BARD. Bea Shapiro stated the committee was working with Sun Sounds to provide the podcasts and



she hoped to continue to offer information on different topics. Ms. Shapiro stated the AT Committee would be presenting at the Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE) on clinical low vision and would be offering CEUs for ophthalmologists and optometrists attending the presentation. Bea Shapiro stated the committee would also be able to offer CRC credits to counselors attending the presentation.

### **Independent Living (IL) Committee**

Ted Chittenden stated the IL Committee was in the process of developing a workgroup that Brian Dulude had agreed to Chair. Brian Dulude stated the workgroup would be investigating Best Practices for providing virtual services to visually impaired individuals in the OIB program. Bob Kresmer stated his understanding that the committee would be reviewing the OIB policies and possibly revise those policies. Ted Chittenden stated that Public Information Committee member, Dean Colston, had resigned from the committee and had been instrumental in developing the Annual Report. Ted Chittenden stated that he would therefore be assisting in developing the Annual Report.

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

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

Janet Fisher stated that Karen Keninger, National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), had retired and the NLS had recently hired Jason Broughton as the new Director. Janet Fisher stated she attended a webinar to discuss how to retrieve materials through the Marrakesh Treaty, which allowed the library access to materials from other countries. Ms. Fisher noted that 518 audio books had been entered into BARD and there had been over 14,000 downloads. Janet Fisher stated the audio books were available in Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Polish, Spanish, and Vietnamese, and individuals could select their preferred language. Janet Fisher thanked the AT Committee for their development of a podcast, in which they invited library staff to provide information about the Talking Book Library and BARD. Ted Chittenden stated that when he searched BARD, some titles were not listed according to subject, and were only available under the new titles. Mr. Chittenden stated he received the 20-cell Braille display as part of the library's pilot program, and he would be able to provide an update at the next meeting. Janet Fisher stated her understanding that the new titles have not been kept up to date, and there may be a delay in the searching for those items. Terri Hedgpeth inquired BARD would include the search function for preferred language as well. Janet Fisher stated she was unsure whether that would be added under the recent

titles, although BARD did include the ability to choose a language. Terri Hedgpeth stated she received an e-reader as part of the library's pilot program as well, and the device was easy to access the library's services.

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

Mike Gordon stated SAAVI continued the certification process for becoming a Structured Training Center under Dr. Edward Bell. Mr. Gordon stated that 9 students were in the Graduate program with Louisiana Tech and were performing internships and receiving certifications in AT, O&M, and RT. Mike Gordon stated the residential program was slowly rebuilding and there were currently 10-12 students. He noted the Stepping Out and the adult residential students were staying in residential housing in Tucson. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI finished the Ready, Set, Go Transitional Camp, a 6-week residential program, and the NFB Braille Camp was held virtually and were successful. He noted Mike Gordon received notice that the organization would provide comprehensive training to individuals in rural areas virtually and in person. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding SAAVI's policies surrounding vaccines and masks. Mike Gordon stated all staff and students were required to be vaccinated and were tested regularly on site. Mr. Gordon stated the Phoenix office did close for a couple of days when a staff member tested positive for COVID. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI was in the process of compiling accessibility equipment in the case that staff or students required the need to close an office temporarily. Mike Gordon stated SAAVI had reenacted social distancing and continued to follow all safely precautions.

### ***Helen Keller National Center***

Jonathan Pringle stated the HKNC was planning to re-open in New York, although the date had been pushed back to get staff in place. Mr. Pringle stated that students had to be cleared to attend and that 4 students from Arizona would be returning to New York. Jonathan Pringle stated the Regional Representative, Cathy Kirscher, had retired and Chad Metcalf would be filling her position.

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

John McCann stated the American Council of the Blind (ACB) National Conference was to be held July 17-23 virtually, which included 166 breakout sessions. Mr. McCann stated ACB radio was now ACB media and included 10 channels to account for overflow. John McCann stated the council had modified the Constitution, which allowed for remote meetings and voting, to carry out business during the pandemic. Terri Hedgpeth stated that most

sessions from the conference had been uploaded on the website and included a lot of great information for anyone interested.

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

Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA State Convention was scheduled for September 2-5 and would focus on bringing equality to all areas of society for blind and visually impaired individuals. Donald Porterfield stated the organization voted to hold a virtual conference and the agenda would be available on the NFBA website with the Zoom links to access the seminars. Mr. Porterfield stated the Phoenix Seminar would be held in January, where the NFBA would advocate for additional ILB funding, UEB Braille certifications, and a change to the absentee vote bill, which would impact how blind and visually impaired individuals were able to vote. Donald Porterfield stated the NFB National Conference in July was well attended with over 6000 participants. He noted the NFB hoped to hold an in-person convention in New Orleans in 2022 and in Houston in 2023. Ted Chittenden inquired whether the national conference would be in person only, or whether there would be an option to attend virtually. Donald Porterfield stated the conference would likely be streamed, although he was unsure whether the conference would allow individuals to attend remotely.

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

The next meeting of the GCBVI Full Council will be on November 12, 2021 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. Ted Chittenden seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:55.

As of June 30, 2021, the statistics are:

The total number of individuals in the VR program was 880  
The total number of Veterans in VR Program was 27  
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 153  
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 47.1  
The median number of days application to eligibility was 26  
The eligibility determination compliance within 60 days was 85.8%  
The number of new plans written was 662  
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 127.3  
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 84  
The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 70.9%  
The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$100.00  
The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$11.54  
The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$22.84  
The number of clients placed was 60  
The number of clients closed successfully was 39

As of June 30, 2021, the Deaf Blind Population statistics:

The total number of individuals in the VR program was 46  
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 8  
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 44.8  
The median number of days from application to eligibility was 53  
The eligibility determination compliance with 60 days was 87.5%  
The number of new plans written was 26  
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 97.6  
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 88  
The IPE Implementation Compliance within 90 days was 85.7%  
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 3  
The number of clients closed successfully was 1