

Meeting Minutes

BUREAU OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND BUREAU OF BLINDNESS AND VISUAL SERVICES CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

Abbreviations: ACBP: Advisory Committee for the Blind of Pennsylvania (appointed by Governor)

BBVS: Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services

BVRS: Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

CAC: Citizen Advisory Committee

CIL: Center for Independent Living

CMU: Case Management Unit

ID: Intellectual disabilities

IL: Independent Living

ILOB: Independent Living Older Blind Program

ODHH: Office for the Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing

O&M: Orientation and Mobility

RAC: Rehabilitation Advisory Committee (state committee appointed by the Governor)

RT: Rehabilitation Teacher

PWD: People with disabilities

SS-A: Specialized Services-Adult program

SS-C: Specialized Services-Children program

SSP: Support Service Personnel

VRT: Vision Rehabilitation Teacher (same as RT)

VR: Vocational Rehabilitation

In attendance: Jeff Iseman, Statewide Independent Living Council and presenter; Kelly Jurina, Supervisor, Dauphin County Case Management Unit and presenter; Rodger Simmons, Chair, CAC; Bobbi Simmons, previous customer, wife of Chair; Cathy Long, Secretary, CAC; Frank Abror, Retired BBVS employee interested in participating in CAC; John Horst, previous customer; Pat Kane, BVRS Supervisor; Jessica Hanula, VR Supervisor, BBVS; Deb Price, Schanzenbach Consulting, Assistive Technology Specialist; Chris Ament, Vision Corps; Dan Annis, Omega Consulting, Assistive technology specialist.

Our last meeting of this CAC was December 17, 2019. We did not meet in March because COVID-19 was new and we thought it would be over soon and we would be able to meet together. Since this pandemic is ongoing, we are meeting virtually through a Free Conference Call.com number. Those minutes from the December 17, 2019

meeting were e-mailed out prior to our March, 2020 meeting which was ultimately cancelled. Bobbi Simmons made a motion to accept those minutes as disseminated. Cathy seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

BBVS report: Jessica Hanula. Successful Rehabilitations are at 47. The goal for the year is 48. ILOB: the goal was 90 and they have exceeded this goal at 113 as of this date. Children's program: no closures. Specialized Services-Adult Program: 7 successful closures. The goal was not written on Jessica's print-out. O&M: 55 closures and have surpassed the goal of 47. RT: The goal was 45 and they have 69 successful closures. Other matters. Stan Swaintek, Acting BBVS Director retired in June, 2020. Sharon Zell, LOFA (local office fiscal assistant) also retired in June. Until Harrisburg District Office can hire and train another fiscal assistant, Erie will process the paperwork. Sharon also was the LOFA for BVRS. With her retirement, BVRS is looking to the Reading BVRS to assist them until they have hired a LOFA. BBVS is also down one Social Worker. One Social Worker resigned. Down one clerical. Unable to hire. All caseloads for all programs are being managed. Staff is still tele-working but cases are progressing. Many VR customers have been moved from the waiting list and are now being served. It is anticipated that more VR customers will be moved into active status in July 2020. We asked how many remain on the wait list. Staff did not know but Jeff Iseman reported what he heard

at the most recent OVR board meeting. According to him, there are now 2,200 on the wait list as of June 4, 2020. When it started, we were led to believe the wait list was about 6,000. So thankful progress is now being made to help people needing assistance. Jeff believes about 300 are removed each month from the wait list. These are both BVRS and BBVS customers. As of the end of May, the BBVS Harrisburg District wait list was 227. At age 14, children being served by SS-C will be referred to the VR program and at that time will be placed on the VR wait list. Social workers in the SS-C program will not close that case until the VR program picks up the referral and the referral is in plan service. In this way, children with any needs but age 14 can still receive services from SS-C if VR has not started with them yet due to the wait list. Once SS-C is assured that the VR program is providing services, that SS-C case is closed. Right now BBVS has one Social Worker and the Social work supervisor is handling all the referrals. Deb Price asked about ordering equipment for customers. Currently training is being done virtually. Jessica responded that it is up to the provider how equipment should be provided. Certainly, it seems that in-home visits would be necessary to hook things up, etc. Jeff asked when the next Advisory Committee for the Blind meeting was. No one on the call knew. Cathy reached out and learned that they have not had planned ACBP calls since the early part of 2019. Hopefully, the new BBVS Director can do something about this.

Deb Price talked about how she is working with customers, some remotely but some have to be seen at their homes when equipment comes in, so she brings it and hooks it up, using social distancing, masking, and using disposable gloves, wiping surfaces and equipment to prevent the spread of COVID. If there are questions about the invoice, Pat advised Deb to contact the counselor, and if known, the counselor's supervisor. If no response is received, send matters to pat Kane (patkane@pa.gov) and he will assure that the correct VR supervisor and counselor receive the question and respond back to her.

Jessica reported that the BBVS Summer Academy is going virtual. RT items were ordered for students. They will be cooking virtually, etc.

Frank asked about agency's responsibility to supply masks and gloves when employees resume their visits with customers. The Commonwealth must provide masks for its employees but is not responsible to provide them for customers. Certainly, Commonwealth employees should ask customers with whom they are planning to meet, if they have masks and gloves and will they mask up for the meeting. Note: Jeff indicates that the Department of Human Services has been providing funding for home and community-based services and for institutional staff and

consumers. Big challenge. Sometimes provide direct distribution through managed care entities. Some of this has been funded through the CARES Act and some through state funding.

BVRS Report: Pat Kane. BVRS met their successful closure goal for VR customers which was 281. That occurred a few weeks ago. Last year BVRS did not quite hit the goal. This last year new staff have come on board. Since our last CAC meeting two new staff have come on board. One is an Early Outreach worker and one is a VR counselor. BVRS had to cancel its summer program for students. It was going to be at Penn State. Also, the Early Reach event was cancelled due to COVID-19. This really was a disappointment to the early outreach employees and the transition counselors. It was hoped that this training could be done virtually, but it was a no go. Hopefully next summer this program and education can continue in person. At this time, Commonwealth employees are not able to meet with employers. Ron Davis, Business Service Counselor, also has retired. BVRS does have one Business Service counselor. Mostly his work is being done by contacting through the phone or internet, networking with counselors and their customers to provide job leads. Note: VR is the only service that BVRS provides. Pat says they are expecting to lose another VR counselor soon. Early Outreach employees

are working remotely with schools, families, etc. BVRS is doing over-time and all caseloads are covered.

Jeff Iseman presented. The Statewide Independent Living Council. There are 16 CILs. It used to be one more but two CILs merged. SILC works with CILs, with transportation, with the Office of long-term living, community-based services, cross disabilities. Employment is important. They work with the National Council on Independent Living state and federal and locally. Currently working on their State Plan for the next three years. The board voted in May, 2020 and did recommend some changes. The deadline to get it done is June 21, 2020, at which time OVR signs off on the plan and the feds have to receive it by June 30, 2020. This federal department is Health and Human Services, Administration on Community Living (ACL). All 50 states and 6 U.S. territories must do this. The plan is effective October 1, 2020. The main issues people advocated for were transportation, home and community-based services, housing, (affordable and accessible housing), advocacy and accessibility. Probably will put out a Request for Proposals for that. The last time they put out a Request for Proposal, the CIL in Allentown got the contract and matched it to engage all CILS. Anyone interested in working on any areas can partner with your local CIL on issues. The current year we are finishing out on is concentrated on emergency preparedness, accessible

voting, and the U.S. census. That ends September 30, 2020. Working on a questionnaire for state policy-makers. Attempting to get “them” to think systemically in terms of the larger picture and have consumers get involved in outlying counties and to do work statewide on approaches to things. The budget is only for five months at this time and goes into effect July 1, 2020 through November 30, 2020. Legislators will be voting on a budget after election on November 3rd but before November 30. Terms of state legislators ends November 30. They can put something together for another few months before the new legislators start their term with new leadership and if the party changes, where the Democrats control either the Senate or the House there will be additional changes in who makes the policies. The budget is level funding for most programs. Programs who received more than level funding were home and community-based services for physical disabilities, Office of Long-Term Living and Senior citizens, Community Health Choices, intellectual disabilities and autism, public schools and special education, and additional dollars for housing. This money came from the Cares Act that Pennsylvania received. One thing not included in the CARES Act was additional VR funds. That was also not included in the HEROES Act. That passed the U.S. House and is in the Senate. Probably will not move. Even if the HEROES Act does move, there is no additional money for Vocational Rehabilitation. That would include BBVS, BVRS, and ODHH. Additional federal money could be added in a new federal budget. The

current budget expired September 30. Congress must hammer out a new federal budget when they come back from their Labor Day holiday. Also, they must do a re-authorization for transportation. This is in process. A House version for this came out a few weeks ago and is so far known as Best in America bill. They will next mark up the draft of the bill and then Jeff will send this to his e-mail distribution list. PennDOT is looking for more money for 5310 vehicles, which is what paratransit uses. They use this money for PWD and shared rides. Comments Jeff has heard is that the House version is more robust, and there is more of an urban focus. The Senate would like it to be focused more on rural needs. Senator Casey is working on getting the ABLE Agency Adjustment Act passed. Are we familiar with the ABLE accounts? This is for people who have been disabled before the age of 26, family and friends can deposit money into an account the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania controls but the rules about how much can be used and for what are many and stringent. Anyway, Senator Casey wants to raise the eligibility for such an ABLE account from age 26 to age 46. Senator Casey's bill is S651. Amazingly, Senator Toomey also signed off on it too. There is also bipartisan support in the House. There are seven members from Pennsylvania but no one from Central Pa. There are 75 co-sponsors. Members not signed on for this: Scott Perry, Fred Keller, Dan Mucer, Lloyd Smucker, and John Joyce. Note: spelled phonetically—please correct if you know better). These men all serve in Central Pennsylvania in different

areas of it. Frank asked about the Deaf-Blind Program where SSP support, and hours of service are given to this population who have dual sensory disabilities. Jeff explained the program. People enrolled in this program initially got 20 hours of service each month. Then funding decreased and everyone enrolled got 15 hours. Later it was downgraded to just 10 hours per month. This funding stream was not meant to be ongoing, although sadly, the people needing the service continue to have the ongoing need for it! But people with this dual sensory disability find it difficult to advocate for themselves. The money is scheduled to run out September 30, 2020. However, there is a bill sponsored by Representative Dan Miller, Allegheny County, HB2188. That bill has not moved. Money is the problem. Congressman Matthew Cartright is the only member Pennsylvania has on the House Appropriations Committee federally. This gentleman is mostly interested in programs for people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. Deaf people are good advocates in the northeast. As far as state funding, that will be limited and SILC does not have the ability to fund it. When the SILC had their hearings for advocates to come and discuss what is important to them, not much was said about the SSP Program. That's why it is important to go to or call into meetings when they occur to advocate for what you want. Hopefully the state or federal can come up with some money. If no money, the program goes away. Contact Sharon Behan at CILCP at 717-731-1900, extension 224. It should be noted that before SSP's begin

to work with a customer, they receive specific training to do so. Many know sign language but need to learn more about how blindness complicates their dual disability. Jeff stated everybody seems to go to Senator Casey for everything, but Jeff wants us to know that Cartright would be someone else to speak with, because that gentleman has an investment in deafness. SSP's are paid to do this work. Not only have the hours decreased for the customers, but payment that SSP's receive for providing the service has been decreased to make the money last as long as possible for this much-needed service. No companion Senate bill. They may try to start it up in 2021 or 2022. Unless VR comes up with some money for it, this program may end September 30, 2020.

Kelly Jurina, Dauphin County Case Management Unit, addressed us. Kelly is a supervisor for the I.D. unit. We asked to explain to us how services of CMU and OVR interact and are provided. The people Kelly serves have either an intellectual disability or have autism. When a customer begins with the Case Management Unit, an intake interview helps everyone understand what services and supports will be needed. Needs are prioritized. Some services may have a waiting list and that customer is put on the waiting list. Money must be available before some services can be provided. Example: employment services. In 2018 Act 36 Pennsylvania Employment First, meant that some services have changed. No longer do they have

sheltered workshop, or at least this type of employment where people are segregated from others who do not have disabilities is not considered to be substantial gainful employment. In these employment settings, it is not uncommon for people employed there who have a disability to be paid below the minimum wage. New services are provided through waivers. CMU works closely with the ODP. There are three waivers. 1. The Consolidated waiver, which is the unlimited waiver. There are no caps on annual funding for this waiver. 2. The Community Living waiver has a \$70,000 annual waiver cap. 3. Persons Family Directed Services. There is a \$33,000 annual cap on this waiver. Individuals in this third waiver could receive an additional \$15,000 for employment services only. \$33,000 for whatever, and then \$15,000 only for employment-related activities. With CMU, ODP and OVR, employment is the first priority. Everyone who is employment age should have some kind of work commensurate with their interests, skills, and abilities. Certainly it must be realistic. CMU offers advanced supported employment services, small group employment, and supports employment. Within the supported employment service they offer career assessment, a six-month timeframe where different providers assess the customer trying out various skill levels and use that to help the customer and all agencies to determine where the customer best fits. There also is supported employment job finding and development, which happens after that six-month assessment, and the ultimate goal is job placement

for the customer. In this level of training, resumes are developed, etc. The last service is supported employment job support. After customer obtains a job, a supported employment individual goes with them and helps them learn what is expected of them. This person intercedes with supervisor and management on that job until it is determined that the individual can function without supported employment. A referral must be made to request these services. If OVR determines that the individual does not meet their criteria and is ineligible, CMU needs that documentation to begin providing waiver services. CMU also could receive a closure letter or a denial of services from OVR and that would be good enough for CMU to pick up the individual on their caseload. Kelly explained how services could be provided to people without getting the closure letter or denial letter from OVR. If they request documentation from OVR but receive nothing within 180 days, the customer can go to waiver services and get help that way. If an individual is 14 years of age through age 26 known as transitioning age, CMU is required to do an OVR referral for all of those individuals before CMU can take them on. CMU also partners with Project Search to help customers have internships at three employment sites to determine what skills they have. After the internship, a job is offered. This could be full-time or part-time, preferred to have their customers be offered full-time if they are capable of it. This includes transportation training. CMU has Employment First committees and Dauphin County CMU partners with

Cumberland and Perry counties. This committee meets monthly and they work on initiatives to help their customers. They put on an annual transition fair. Sadly, due to COVID-19 Transition Fair was cancelled. This helps high school students to receive education on about employment or programs and offerings in Dauphin or Cumberland Counties. Vendors provide services, including people who are self-employed. These self-employed individuals come and talk to the students. I remember that happening in my high school years. About once a year they would have what we called Career Day. I always found it very helpful and fun. As a result I had a career in State Government for 35 years and two months and prior to that at a hospital in Medical Transcription for four years. OVR put me through secretarial school. My knowledge of medical terminology put me in good stead as I worked in Vocational Rehabilitation. The Transition Council partners with and works with school districts in the area in Dauphin, Cumberland, and Perry Counties. Discussion supports how to streamline the process for employment to make it as easy on the individual and his/her family to achieve successful employment. Questions surrounded more particulars about the waiver programs. The first two are more difficult to get. The third one is the one most used.

General discussion: Cathy spoke about the virtual conference and convention. It will begin October 21 in the afternoon and will be on ACB Radio, Live Event, via zoom,

which people can dial in on their land line to access, and ACB also has a phone number just to dial in if individuals only have a land line, but no computer, or no smart phone. Also, the Amazon device can enable skills to listen to the conference and convention through her. If you have a Victor Reader, you can get ACB Radio through that device. Most events start around 4:00, but pretty much all day Saturday, October 24th. On Sunday, October 25 they are planning on having an auction, which is a fund raiser. Registration is \$20. If you register, you will be eligible to get door prizes. There will be break-out sessions as well. Choose what you want to attend. Many times there are several choices for break-out sessions occurring at the same time. For more information, write to Tom Burgunder, Chair of the Conference Program Planning Team at tjburg@verizon.net. Tom's phone number is 412-502-6931. Cathy's cell phone number is 717-991-7433. Note: if you are not in Cathy's contact, the phone will directly go to voice mail, so if you leave voice mail, Cathy will call you back. If you call but do not leave voice mail, no call back. It's a good way to get rid of spammers or people wishing to sell something to her that she did not ask for! By the end of September registration will be on the website. Go to <http://www.pcb1.org/convention/registration/>. There will be virtual exhibitors as well. Exhibitors will have submitted prerecorded statements that will be played on ACB Radio during the time the conference and convention is not convened. Also, the American Council of the Blind will be virtual and available via Zoom, a phone number, through

Victor Reader, through smart phone, and through Amazon. It begins July 2, 2020. It lasts seven days and activities start at 9:00 a.m. but continue until at least 10:30 P.M. Certainly there will be a myriad of topics of interest to you.

Frank stressed the importance of this CAC. This is as important to this District Office as the State Rehabilitation Council is to the state. We are meeting via federal mandate. The state rehab council mandated each CAC at the district office level. Frank stated he believed District Administrators should be in attendance to participate and respond to questions. We have fine CAC coordinators supporting us. He made his point by stating that if the President of the United States is expected to go to a meeting but instead sends the Secretary of State, it is suspect. It has become the norm that neither District Administrator has attended our CAC meetings. Frank implores the CAC Chair to determine with D.A.'s why they are not attending our CAC meetings. Rodger will do this.

Next meeting. We will meet virtually on September 15, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. Phone number to be determined and distributed to all prior to the next meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cathy Long, Secretary