

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
Monday, April 26, 2021
MINUTES

Attendees:

Suzanne Erb, Shari Brightful (DA/BVRS), Kathy Fogel (ADA/BVRS), Alexander Shay (Acting DA/BBVS), Lynn Heitz (ASB), Wayne Trout (Retired BVRS/DA), Andrew Pennington (CAP), Cassandra Shavney (Phila. Works), Ali Smale (Director of Employment/Kencrest Services & Rep for Good Neighbors Time Bank), Joan Nelson (Vision for Equality)

WELCOME:

Suzanne Erb/CAC Chairperson opened the meeting 10:00 A.M. and said we would wait 5 minutes for a few more people to join. She welcomed all and introduced herself. She then requested introductions of all professionals in attendance.

Chair then continued with approval of minutes from last meeting which she put on the floor for a vote. Wayne Trout moved to approve and Lynn Heitz second, thus minutes were approved.

Chair introduced the speaker, Cassandra Shavney/Apprenticeship Program Specialist for Philadelphia Works. Chair stated that she had heard a similar presentation at the Philadelphia Forum meeting a couple of months ago and it was really a great program, thus thought this would be a very good topic for her to present and talk about today, thus Ms. Shavney was welcomed.

Cassandra Shavney Presentation (Power Point Presentation Attached)

Ms. Shavney began by introducing herself by stating that she works for Philadelphia Works which is the workforce development for the city where we manage a lot of workforce investment funding dollars and oversee the PA CareerLink centers which help connect job seekers to both employment and training opportunities. She is a member of a small but mighty team that specifically works to promote apprenticeship programming. So we both work on outreach to employers and businesses in Philadelphia and the surrounding counties to explain and explore apprenticeship programming, and we also work with other types apprenticeship partners which there a lot in the apprenticeship program, and we work to connect those organizations to each other. You will see in our slide deck that will be put up will be branded with Apprenticeship PHL which is a regional, public, and private collaborative. We have about 20 members in the collaborative, and we come together to discuss how to promote apprenticeships within the region.

She began with explaining what presenter definition of apprenticeship is for all, knowing that there are a lot of ideas or concepts of what an apprenticeship is or could be, and she will begin with what she means by apprenticeship. Her team works very closely with the apprenticeship and training office out of the PA Department of Labor & Industry. Their the organization that

actually registers or oversees the management of apprenticeships in the state, thus with apprenticeship registration comes a certain set of guidelines about what an apprenticeship is, thus this presentation will explain, as well as some of the other benefits that come with the apprenticeship program.

PRESENTATION BEGAN (See Attached)

Alexander Shay stated that he thinks this information is great and forwarded to counselors. Is this something that they need to keep in their toolbox for any/all customers ready for employment to just sort of partner with you or just to have them research this to just explore this as an option?

Ms. Shavney responded “Yes”, she would say so, because she thinks that one of the things that she and her partner are trying to do is trying to spread the word about apprenticeship. She believes that everyone thinks of something when they hear the word “apprenticeship”, and we are really trying to just share that apprenticeships exist and that they are growing here in the city, and they are a very viable pathway for folks to enter. It is not just for training programs, because when you are an apprentice, you become an employee of that company coupled with the training for that position. Also we are working with the PA CareerLink centers to also try and better and more deeply integrate apprenticeships into our workforce system and just trying to promote apprenticeship as an actual pathway that is on par with any other traditional way of entering employment.

Shari Brightful/BVRS DA stated that BVRS in the past was able to work with she believes a team that she believes was JEVS and some of the Philadelphia Works team and tried to collaborate with the IT Career Readiness Program which she believes for pre-apprenticeship and what we found was Philadelphia Works was very strong at communicating what pre-apprenticeship could be and for bringing on new partners like Kencrest, CIS, Sparc and Spin and a lot of other providers who help people with disabilities connect to employment that they were really good to have at the table, because sometimes there were some barriers that needed to be addressed in order for our customers to be successful and ready for apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship, thus I know that you are doing outreach and sharing information, but I think that one of the things that is important is that we do serve mutual customers. There are a lot of job seekers in Philadelphia who may or may not have a disability and educating all parties who come together for apprenticeship about important agencies like OVR and our providers need to be at the table to discuss the success of our customers.

Ms. Shavney agreed with Shari Brightful. They are in the process of working on rebuilding this momentum and they are happy to facilitate connections and make sure that OVR is brought into conversations. She also went on to make all aware of the apprenticeship navigator registered apprenticeship which is a registered apprenticeship that trains individuals to be apprenticeship navigators, so that they can be folks to develop, help, support, build and maintain apprenticeship programs. The first cohort is wrapping up soon and will be graduating very shortly and last week the 2nd cohort of navigators started their program, and there are maybe 2 or 3 from OVR in the cohort. They are not from Philadelphia. She believes that they are from the central region of PA, but she is hopeful that their participation in the navigator program will only help to

strengthen the connections between OVR and big apprenticeship opportunities. There are also CareerLinks staff in the navigator program as well in this upcoming cohort, thus she is hopeful for appropriate connections with their offices to be able to support and promote apprenticeships to OVR and CareerLink customers.

Suzanne Erb asked if there has been any talk about going in the opposite direction and having training for businesses about the kind of jobs that people with disabilities are doing and have been doing and how they can accommodate persons with disabilities in their businesses. She thinks that it is great to have information about apprenticeship programs, etc. and I think it is necessary, but she also thinks that it could be very helpful to go the opposite direction and have programs for businesses to provide information about the possibility of people with disabilities working in various traits.

Ms. Shavney responded that she is not sure if there are any specific initiatives coming out of Philadelphia Works for this, but it makes her think back to the apprenticeship navigator program. In the 1st cohort program we did have a couple of trainings for the navigators in discussing how to increase female representation in high numbers and she knows that in the incoming cohort program they are integrating that training data and also a very specific DEI training, and it may be a good idea to implement this disability workplace training for our navigators as they go out and help to promote apprenticeship programs to businesses that this can be another piece that they are able to speak with businesses about.

Suzanne responded and stated that she believes that they would need very specific training. She is sure that there are lots of people who would be very glad to help you in putting together the needed training for all cohorts and she feels that you would want to have this training included and made available not only for the future cohorts, but past cohorts as well, so that all would get the training.

Ms. Shavney asked for a contact to follow-up within regard to Suzanne Erb request and Suzanne said she would be the contact.

Suzanne further went on to say that she can think of a profile for lots of people with disabilities that this could work for if it was implemented properly. I also think that this would be a great way for people to learn a trade and because these are positions where you don't necessarily need 2 years of college and this and that, as well as I think this really offers a lot of possibilities for people and if there have been barriers in the past, I think it really would make sense to see if there is anything we can do to alleviate barriers. She is glad that Maria is a part of the team because she has familiarity with the mental health population which is a plus.

Suzanne then asked Lynn Heitz what do you think about apprenticeships for people who are blind? Don't you think that really could work?

Lynn responded that she believes it could work, but the businesses need to know about accessibility assuming they have the knowledge.

Ms. Shavney responded that there is an apprenticeship program on the other side of the country in Washington state out of the Joint Aero Space Apprenticeship Committee and they have a program for blind individuals to train as CMC operators which is a machinist program. She has heard snippets about it, but if anyone is interested, she can dig up and provide more information. She is not sure how many have gone through this program, but she knows it has been in existence and operating for a few years and very successful.

Suzanne asked that information be forwarded for examples or ideas for other things that they could try since we do not have the program.

Lynn asked if the program in Washington state pays moving costs.

Ms. Shavney responded she is not sure.

Suzanne thanked Ms. Shavney and stated that the information that was presented today will go out far and wide and not just for the ones present on this call.

Suzanne Erb then gave the floor to Lynn Heitz to speak on ASB and what they are doing.

ASB Update/Lynn Heitz

Lynn informed all that ASB is still following through with the same program of training and enrichment. We are looking at forming a task force. We discovered that in Pittsburgh there is a task force organization that gathers every 2 months to talk about the needs of the deaf blind and hard of hearing. So, Lynn spoke with a contact about doing something similar on this side of the state and including individuals who are blind, deaf, or visually impaired. That's really the new thing on the block, but it's not up and running yet. The organization in Pittsburgh has representation from local mental health agencies, homecare agencies, The Office of Deaf & Hard of Hearing and some other local service providers. Basically, they are all trying to figure out how they can better communicate with this population, because there has been a lot of isolation, especially over the last year.

Alexander Shay asked is the task force something Rod is aware of, because he thinks that this is good that Lynn Heitz is doing this for deaf and blind population, because for a couple years we only had Marsha and the Harrisburg CIL working with the SSP and providers. He really thinks it's good that you are doing this, even though we don't have a lot of cases, but obviously they are just as important for deaf/blind, so any kind of things that can help us do better would be great.

Lynn Heitz responded with if you want to share that with Rod, I am sure he will say that well Alex, I think you should be part of this.

Alexander Shay responded with maybe when you have more information or when you get it off the ground that could be a possibility.

Lynn Heitz stated that the Pittsburgh counselor representation from Pittsburgh Blind & Visual Services.

Suzanne Erb asked Lynn Heitz, do you know how to get a hold of Marsha, because she feels Marsha would be a natural fit for this too.

Lynn Heitz responded with “YES”!

BBVS Report/Alexander Shay (Acting DA)

Damon Johnson our previous District Administrator left to take another position with Temple University as an Associate Director of Disability Services, and since his departure I have been serving as Acting District Administrator. Damon is doing well, and he does maintain contact with him which there is excellent opportunities for collaboration which we are trying to brainstorm for BBVS.

As far as our goals, it's a struggle with VR, and I think it is the same across the state. Our goal is 69 successful closures and at present we have 54. Our social workers did a heck of a job and exceeded their goals. Our vision rehabilitation therapists and orientation mobility they are a little bit more than halfway.

As far as positions, it's been challenging, because we have been on a hiring freeze since last March 2020, so there have just been efforts to try and get exemptions for hiring as all the offices in OVR have been doing. We have only had (1) social worker since last June and we have interviewed and selected a candidate which the paperwork has been submitted to Human Resources. That's all that has been posted and done at this time.

I am sure Kathy Fogel and Shari Brightful will mention this, but as for BBVS team there has been a major project coming from the Governor's Office as far as working with InspiriTec which I learned more about them being an Ability One contractor to work with people with disabilities. They do a lot of temporary staffing. Each of the offices has a goal to meet these set goals of referrals to the PUSH NOW is a customer representative that pays 15.00/hr. and is a temporary job, I believe from one of the FAQs going through September. Unemployment Compensation needs a lot of help, so these positions would kind of field lower level questions and based on the ticket they could pass over to another representative. This is supposed to help with claims, I believe.

As far as us quite frankly and I am happy when we were given a presentation, they were frank with us that people with higher partial vision they may have an easier time with the screen magnifiers and zoom text. The unemployment compensation's software is extremely old using MS DOS software which is not compatible with InspiriTec. They are trying to roll out new software in middle of May to hopefully get it accessible for screen readers. This is a major issue that we are not happy with, but we are still encouraged to make referrals. Fortunately, these jobs offers flexibility for part-time or full-time, just the customers must be prepared to do a full two-week training which is not negotiable. It's like mass training which they want InspiriTec to get 1000 people hired across the state. This has just been a major push and we have made 8 referrals

so far. This is like a matter of the last couple weeks where we have been trying to look through our caseloads to get people referred and we have a goal of 11. Inspiritec does other jobs, but the major push is those customer service reps.

We have been given approval last month early March for Instructional Services staff for our Orientation & Mobility and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist to go into the field to see customers on a very limited basis. Based on if a client needs help in their home, live alone or need help with independent living, if they need services to help them related to college independent living, traveling for college, or pursuing or maintaining work. There's some discretion involved where we have meetings with the instructors and supervisors, but we are still doing services virtually. This is for those individuals that need assessments and trainings where in person is just the best course of action which our staff are following COVID protocols and we are supplying them with PPE. So right now, we just have orientation mobility staff in the field and the VRTs it's a last resort, if you can't do anything virtually with their customers.

The STRIVE ON program is the summer academy program which has been reconfigured into what is known as STRIVON which I had to look up what this acronym means, because it's been a while. It is the Student Transition Readiness into Vocation & Education, so this is a PRE ETS program for high school students where there are two sessions, spring and then the fall. In the spring which is ongoing now and started March 4th and going to May 27th where we had 33 students referred by our counselors and 16 of those Philadelphia which I am very proud of our counselors. It's virtual and weekly, but it's just twice a week that they meet for 2 hours in the evening for 12 weeks and this spring session is focused on employability. Then in the fall, we will be putting an emphasis on postsecondary preparation using assistive technology, as well as workplace readiness which this program will run from September 16th through December 9th. We are still doing the other programs like contracting with IDEAL where I must see if Overbrook is still doing their TDI program. IDEAL is the 4-week summer program in the Center for Blind & Visually Impaired in Chester City.

Suzanne Erb asked for any other questions for Alexander Shay's report for BBVS which Wayne Trout asked are InspiriTec and Ability One contracts they same as when he was District Administrator?

Alexander Shay responded that there shouldn't have been any change from then to now.

Alexander Shay continued with this is just a push here. They must have a disability for sure with this. Central Office did a very thorough training for us where we must get the releases and have planned amendments signed and we are doing on the job training reimbursements 90 days 100% at 15.00/hr. and the releases are so we can talk with Inspiritec and so the customer can request from us a Certificate of Eligibility because the need to prove that they have a disability. Fortunately, if there are any customers that are placed on the temporary basis as an encouragement to counselors, it does count as a closure for their performance evaluation.

It was stated that these jobs could be a resume builder especially if you have the good customer service skills for those abilities working with public, so this may turn into a permanent.

BVRS Report/Shari Brightful (Philadelphia BVRS District Administrator)

For the Philadelphia OVR/BVRS office Alex mentioned that we are still on a hiring freeze, however, we have submitted to the Executive team by way of my direct supervisor Stephanie Perry what our hiring priority needs are for our office. We have been told that they will be posting for 2 VR Counselors for our office which doesn't meet the full needs of our office, but we are happy with whatever we can get approved by the Acting Secretary of Labor & Industry. We hope to be able to share that information when the posting goes up.

We also were informed that we will be receiving approval hopefully to soon post for a VR Supervisor for our office as well.

In an effort to continue to manage the growing referrals that we have in our office, as well as to make sure that we are serving our population as best we can, our office has moved into what we call a reorganization where we now have developed a transition unit in our office which is a specific unit being supervised by Sharon Silverman with Kathy Fogel overseeing this change. There are specific individuals which I believe we have 2 Early Reach Coordinators, Tamani Love-Molett who works with PETS services and 3 VRCs who are assigned to this unit. As we continue to get approval to hire people, we plan to have a second transition unit as a backup, because of the need in Philadelphia for these services.

We also moved into assignment of our territories. Our office has a new setup of how we assign new applications for our VR staff which is now done by territory where each unit has been assigned a territory that they cover and when a new referral comes in based on the zip code of that particular customer determines what unit will handle that referral. We have moved many cases around in our office to set up this territory assignment. We are just now introducing our transition unit to the school district of Philadelphia and talking with them about our new procedure, as far as how they are going to invite us to IEP and the SOP that we will be presenting and discussing with the School District of Philadelphia. This meeting is coming up with school district staff, I believe, next month.

As far as goals, as of April 15th, our office was able to assist 155 customers with gaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.

Kathy Fogel then provided update on InspiriTec initiative for BVRS by informing all that Dave Bautista who is the Supervisor of Business Services is working closely with his point of contact Sally Belly who is our Business Services Counselor and then we have a Business Services Rep Tasha Carter reaching out to each unit and their supervisor and counselor who can make at least 7 referrals to InspiriTec. The Business Services team is doing what we call a Talent Pipeline so that any customer who has an IPE goal of customer service or something related, we can drill down in CWDS our computer system and find those customers and reach out to them. Shari Brightful has even put her customer service phone call hat on and has reached out to customers to see if they are interested in pursuing this really great opportunity. Philadelphia has a goal which as of last week we are a little under halfway there, but we are getting close. I think it is a big push to make I believe 1000 referrals to this PUC opportunity.

As Alex Shay mentioned, its coming from the governor on down, thus we really hope to have this opportunity for our customers. They get great skills, they get the computer, they get training and can work from home which some may turn into a full-time job. They have an opportunity to work part-time or full-time, so this is a really great opportunity for our customers and as Alex Shay also said, if the customer gets hired and works those 90 days, all that hard work that our staff put in can also claim as a 26/successful closure.

Shari Brightful resumed with Fiscal Report stating we are doing pretty good with funds, as far as making sure we have sufficient funds to provide VR services, as well as transition services.

What we have been doing along with everything else that's going on, is we have been trying to focus on being able to meet with our providers one on one to help them understand our billing and also the period of performance. A lot of our providers we don't get a chance to talk with them one on one just to provide technical assistance and help them understand how to fill out a report, how to bill, how to make sure that they are in line with **the fiscal procedures**, and make sure that they are getting paid timely. Sonali Patel, Kathy Fogel and our Fiscal Assistant Linda Ravalli have been working very closely with the providers that seem to be having some difficulties with our billing procedure and making sure they bill timely. Since we are virtual, we don't have to drive anywhere for a meeting, thus we have been getting calls with them and trying to instruct/assist as best we can.

We are also working on canceling any unused purchase orders we have. I am **still hearing** individuals are not quite ready to go out into the open, whether it be training or employment, thus we are still working with them, but the funds that were authorized so that they could do training or any support that they may need for employment, we don't want those funds to go to waste, so we can use those funds on other customers who do need these funds. As such we have been focusing our efforts on cancelling unused open purchase orders.

We also wanted to make sure that we shared that there are some summer activities for our youth. We in the eastern part of the state sent out an invite to some providers that we thought may be interested in offering some summer opportunities to youth. There was a presentation the Professional Connection Experience which is the 2 week provider agreement for our students to get like the first week of experience doing maybe learning about on the job types of soft skills and then the second week is getting some experience, maybe doing actual mock interviews or taking tours with employers.

Kathy Fogel/Assistant District Administrator Update:

Then there is a secondary opportunity and that's a 6 week program for our students to work with the provider that will take them to an actual college, thus the provider needs to have a connection with either Temple, Arcadia or community college where they get to experience on hand the actual college environment and see the student office of disabilities and get some experience that way.

Then the third opportunity is My Work Initiative which is a 6-to-8-week program where the student does actual work, thus the student must be a little more independent where they can do

an OJT. It's based off a Pittsburgh model where they work with the municipalities, but we are hoping to see if there is a provider who has a connection with an employer that we can place a cohort of students, up to 8. There are two tiers they can work part-time or full-time which they get paid.

The good part about all three initiatives is whether they get paid through OJT, the My Work Initiative or the Professional Connection Experience, they get a stipend at the end and the same with the post-secondary.

Andrew Pennington shared that he attended several other CACs and he heard that there was an approval from Central Office to hire up to 50 counselors statewide. Have you heard anything about this?

Shari Brightful responded with they did a call with us and managers across the state as to what the approval is from the Secretary of Labor & Industry, so there is a hiring window where I think each week they are allowed to present to the Secretary what their hiring needs are, and I do know that there were approvals for various classifications, but not exactly sure that it was 50 VR counselors.

Kathy Fogel responded from her notes from that same meeting that it was 13 VRCs. Andrew Pennington then asked what is Philadelphia BVRs staffed at what percentage right now and how many vacancies at present?

Shari responded that we have 7 VRC vacancies and we just got approved for 2. 1 CT2 vacancy, 1 Fiscal Assistant vacancy, 1 BSR vacancy working as employment facilitator, 1 ERC vacancy, 3 Supervisor vacancies and 1 manager vacancy.

Andrew Pennington then asked is there a hiring freeze because there's not enough to supplement the number of counselors or is this something that you are not privy to?

Shari Brightful responded that upper management hasn't really shared that information, but she does know that there is a hiring freeze across the Commonwealth and not just OVR. We weren't told why there is a hiring freeze, unless I missed an update, but I do know we are on a hiring freeze.

Alexander Shay agreed with Shari and said we can only speculate.

Andrew Pennington then asked about the InspiriTec jobs by saying you say customer services and he heard Alex speak of the MS DOS program that they're still working under, but are they answering questions via chat on a web search or is this all telephone based?

Alexander Shay responded with they will provide a computer, if they work from home, they must have an internet connection, but Inspiritec can work with them on getting this. I don't know what that means, whether they will pay or connect them with resources. My impression is a lot of phone work. They are reading from and following scripts. If they are writing a ticket, they must use the program and perhaps email, as well.

Kathy Fogel responded agreeing with Alex while providing accurate information such as they must type 15 words per minute and work Monday through Friday, between 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and the duties are to take inbound calls, collect claims issues information, provide FAQ support, deliver claim status responses and data intake entry.

Joan Nelson asked where we can find the information above for job postings which Shari Brightful responded on Neo Gov which Alex shared how to connect to Neo Gov and access job postings.

Suzanne Erb asked how does a person go about obtaining information about Inspiritec?

Alexander Shay responded that it's on a handout which he can share via email with all present.