

CAC MINUTES
Friday, April 8, 2022
10:00 a.m. Conference Call

In Attendance: Bob Mecca, LIFT; Diana Kreydt, PSU DuBois; Carma Horner, Pitt Bradford, Andrew Pennington, CAP; Brett Lasko, Seneca Highlands IU9; Christy Patterson, OVR.

Welcome & Introductions: Bob Mecca opened the meeting. All attendees introduced themselves. There were no questions or changes to January 2022 meeting notes.

PRESENTATION

Meeting began with a presentation from Andrew Pennington of CAP who thanked Bob and Chris Palmer for inviting him to present. Andrew shared a slideshow and discussed CAP services. CAP is a federally designated statewide advocacy for individuals. They have a mandatory role in public VR programs; OVR has a statutory obligation to assist CAP in fulfilling its role. CAP informs and educates individuals and makes sure they have access to the OVR program. OVR must notify applicants and customers of CAP services. Andrew talked about CAP's mission, core values and principals. He discussed services they provide such as: information and referral, education and training, guidance on the VR process, case related advice and consultation to potential customers and customers of OVR, individual case representation, systemic advocacy (pattern/practice), mediation/appeals, and review and comment on OVR policy. He discussed the scope of CAP services under Section 112 of the Rehabilitation Act as well. CAP can be reached toll free at 1.888.745.2357. Their website is www.equalemployment.org Find them on Facebook at [vradvocate@facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/vradvocate).

Diana Kreydt asked Andrew who are the unserved and underserved populations he mentioned they work with that OVR does not. Andrew noted it is working in tandem with OVR's unserved and underserved population including from mental health to certain ethnicities – areas like Philadelphia have very diverse communities that may be unserved or underserved. He explained that CAP advocates that anyone who has need to those services has access to them. They are tasked with understanding the law and policies. Diana also asked if Andrew could elaborate a little on Supported Employment Services. Andrew noted that OVR and providers are supposed to offer CAP information. It is a complex process involving informed choice, the process itself, and issues with providers. CAP is meant to be a safety net for customers. Sometimes there are periods that can cause an individual to have delays in the process and it can cost them employment such as hours running out and being apart from their job coach, communication issues, the job coach leaving the program, etc. They are a support system for the individual to make sure there are not hiccups or lapses in services -- they try to create a seamless environment for the customer's services.

Brett Lasko asked Andrew to talk about the shortage of employees out there – the shortage of VR counselors, service providers, etc., and what can CAP do to address things along those lines? Is there anything being put in place even at the state level to address these issues? Andrew advised that at the state board meeting it was noted that providers are having trouble hiring because of wages. He added that there have been a lot of administration changes with VR in the last two weeks, and we are in a transition period. If there is not a job coach, CAP can try to help but they can't force something where there is nothing. They will confer with an OVR counselor, supervisor, ADA or DA as to all of the providers in that area and try to speed things up if there is an avenue. However, they have seen full on denials from providers because they can't handle the number

of customers. Within Central Office, there is kind of a pause on new policy and procedure implementation until things get worked out. They understand there needs to be a level of security for providers as well. Brett noted that he sees it as a big issue that is not going away. He added that our OVR office does a great job and even spreads counselors out to assist in other places. He does have concern with people taking too much on and then burnout happening. Andrew added that DuBois does a wonderful job with the individuals they serve; however, this shortage is affecting the whole state. A number of OVR offices are severely understaffed. CAP is hoping to make the process more efficient in working with OVR creatively. Bob Mecca stated being in a meeting recently with Ryan Hyde. He said there were 105 openings with OVR statewide. Bob suggested if they drop the master's requirement down to a bachelor's that they would have more individuals applying for employment. Andrew said there has been a lot of discussion about requirements and feels it would need to be discussed with the union. Fortunately, the hiring freeze has been lifted – although normal position posting can take time.

Brett asked if Andrew could share the slide of their staff and contact information. Andrew noted that he would share the entire power point with CAC members.

OVR Updates

Christy Patterson provided the OVR update as Chris Palmer had another commitment. Christy shared that we have had some administrative changes; Ryan Hyde is now Acting Executive Director. There are a lot of positions available throughout the state that are listed online, and we are hoping to get people onboard. No major changes at this time. District offices buildings are now officially opened. Services have been ongoing throughout the pandemic, and opening the doors was the last step. The DuBois DO is open from 8:00 – 4:30.

Christy shared that we are working on a statewide outreach. Each office will be doing their own so watch for those to come out.

HGAC is back to full swing with all services and full complement of students. All summer programming and the fall open house will be done again this year. (Aimee will share the information with the minutes when they go out.) Access Planning & Strategies is June 20 – 24. Individuals will stay in the dorm. Summer Academy for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing will be held at the end of July with individuals staying at the Center. Individuals need to be referred through their OVR counselor if they are interested in either program. Career and Transition Fair is scheduled to be held October 19-21. General tours of HGAC are also up and running. There is an updated catalog – let us know if you would like an electric copy sent to you.

Andrew Pennington asked if hybrid work has ended for OVR employees now that the doors are open at the DOs. Christy advised that most staff have a hybrid schedule now. Staff continue to be available in the field, and people can now come into the office.

Andrew asked if Christy could speak a little about the Youth Ambassador program. Are any of our providers agreeing to it? Christy advised that we are still in the discussion phase and looking at the feasibility of it in the future.

Brett Lasko asked if individuals need to be an open case with OVR for the June 20-24 summer program at HGAC. Christy stated that was correct. Brett then asked about whether OVR would be able to help with transportation. Christy advised that OVR can help -- depending on where they live, we may be able to do a bus pass or something with Health Ride.

Brett said they are currently attending meetings to learn more about this ambassador position; it is on the radar. They have staff shortages as well, but they are looking at it.

Member Updates

LIFT: Bob Mecca advised that LIFT just hired Kip Stossmeister as their new AT Specialist; he will be a great asset to their team. If anyone has any AT needs, he is at extension #204 or call and ask for Kip. Their staff are permanently on a hybrid schedule; their new phone system gives them full office coverage during hybrid work.

On May 3rd they are having their Youth Conference. They do have a few schools participating with 37 students signed up so far for the virtual event. Bob is hoping for around 100 participants.

June 10th LIFT will be having a wine walk fund raiser; they are working with several downtown businesses. Information is on their social media pages; a huge turnout is expected. Hope worked with the Chamber of Commerce to coordinate a band in the downtown area following the walk. The wine walk will be 5:00 – 8:00 p.m. Afterwards, you can show your wine walk ticket for \$2 off the Chamber event.

July 26th will be their Expo in partnership with Representative Armanini's office; he has given them full support. If you are interested in a table, let Bob know. It will be an in-person event. Brett Lasko asked where the Expo is being held this year. Bob advised it would be at the Red Fern in St. Marys.

Andrew Pennington asked what topics will be covered at the Youth Conference. Brett noted that topics include self-advocacy and self-awareness, banking – importance of establishing credit and opening a bank account (North West Savings Bank), work readiness skills (Link with the local Career Links) – Career Link resume, on the job opportunity session and how to link with Career Links. Service providers, employers, and colleges will have commercial breaks, and Special Olympics will do a quick overview throughout the day. Bob Mecca advised that the keynote speaker is Caitlin Chaser (Miss Wheelchair Pennsylvania), and Charlie Williamson (former LIFT employee) will also give a self-awareness talk about college expenses. Brett added that doing it virtually, they can also link with IU10.

PSU DuBois: Diana Kreydt informed the CAC that PSU DuBois has a new Chancellor Jungwoo Ryoo, and he is doing a lot so far. They are looking at being "One Campus Geographically Dispersed" by 2026 so all campuses will be the same. Disability Services are basically already pretty much there. Brett Lasko asked if they mentioned anything about technology colleges or vocational schools. Diana stated that Disability Services are supposed to be the same as theirs but other than that, she has not heard.

Pitt University Bradford: Carma Horner said they have been very busy with only 3 weeks until graduation. They are in a major state of transition as far as positions at higher levels and a multitude of faculty. The Chancellor over their system will be retiring in a year. They have been in person since the 3rd week of the semester and the mask mandate was lifted a week ago with weekly testing if you are unvaccinated. Carma has moved into a new division but is still doing the same responsibilities.

Seneca Highlands IU9: Brett Lasko stated they are involved with secondary transition initiatives with the 14 school districts that they serve – working with students currently working with OVR. Brett is currently working with Bob on the Youth Conference. He stated being glad to be back at the CAC meeting today and appreciates Carma and Diana's support at the college level.

CAP: Andrew Pennington advised that CAP started attending in person exhibits and conferences; they attended the IU transition conference in Williamsport. Now that VR offices are open, they look forward to visiting them and HGAC as well. He was recently a virtual presenter at a staff meeting for OVR DuBois but would like to get back to in person visits.

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be held Friday, July 8, 2022, and will be scheduled in person at the DuBois District Office with a virtual option as well. Topic/presenter TBD.