

**Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
Monday, January 24, 2022
MINUTES**

ATTENDEES:

Suzanne Erb/Networks for Training & Development, Kathy Fogel/BVRS, Alexander Shay/BBVS, Shari Brightful/BVRS, Julia Burrough (Call-In), Melissa Goode, Damon Johnson, June Watersbey

WELCOME:

Suzanne Erb opened the meeting at 10:00 A.M., starting by thanking all for joining the call. She had all to introduce themselves.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING:

Suzanne proceeded to ask all have they had an opportunity to review the minutes from last meeting. She asked are there any additions or corrections. All agreed YES, they have reviewed and NO there aren't any additions or corrections.

Motion to accept the minutes as is was put on the floor by Suzanne Erb which resulted in acceptance with all necessary corrections by all present.

UPDATE FROM PHILADELPHIA BVRS:

Shari Brightful:

Ms. Brightful began by thanking all of the committee members on our CAC for their participation.

One important update is that she reached out to our point-of-contact here in Philadelphia who sends over our minutes and meeting dates, Ms. Cheryl Bistline. She is the person who sends everything over to PARC to make sure that the actual website is up-to-date with information.

She was in the middle of training new staff and went to the website and realized that our information is not up-to-date over there, including they have the incorrect address for us still being at 444 N. 3rd. She has been working with Cheryl Bistline and making sure that she has been sending the information over for updating which she indicated she has been sending it, as we send it to her, but it just hasn't been updated on the site as of yet. Shari went on to say that she feels that this is important because the committee has been putting forth a lot of effort and being committed to this committee and having great discussions and she wanted to make sure

that it is reflected on the site. So she is working with help from Alex, Steven, Kathy and Pat to make sure that the information, specifically for Philadelphia, is up-to-date on their site, so more to come. Another update will be given at our next CAC and hopefully all information will have been added and we are up-to-date on their site.

Staffing - we have been approved to bring back (2) individuals classified as annuitants who are individuals who have worked for the Commonwealth and have retired and received approval to come back to help support us in our work. Mainly in our office this helps a lot because we do have vacancies. We now have (2) annuitants one is a supervisor, and one is a counselor who have been approved to come back and help support us with the work that we are doing here.

We recently finished doing some interviews to promote someone to a supervisor, thus we are awaiting feedback on the recommended candidate which will help us with our current supervisor vacancies.

We have (2) new staff members/VRCs who just started in late November or December, so we now have (2) more counselors who will be helping us with our Transition Unit. There are a lot of students in Philadelphia and so we are continuing to build our new Transition Unit and very happy to announce that those (2) new staff members are in training and hopefully they will be able, soon, to help us out with our Transition Unit in serving students in Philadelphia.

We just completed interviews for a VR counselor last week and hoping to make another recommendation, so that we can bring on yet another counselor to join the Philadelphia OVR family.

Efforts - she continues to work with her Acting Bureau Director, John Miller along with management team on filling some of these vacancies, so that customers are receiving timely services and our staff are getting the help that they desperately need.

Goals - we had our staff meeting this month. Our office has a goal of assisting individuals with disabilities in gaining competitive integrated employment.

Our goal for the year is 450. We are at, as of January 4th we had 101 closures in the office, so we are working hard to get customers into employment, if that is what they are interested in, but I think we all on the call have talked at length about some of the barriers are, but we continue to just move forward and try and get those who are interested in working out in the community or virtually into competitive employment.

I would like to highlight something that I went over with my staff most recently and that is that we continue to work towards being 100% in compliance with moving cases through the VR statuses. In our office we have struggled with making sure that the cases were moved to each status in a very timely manner, according to RSA measures as far as compliance. Right now our office is at 86% compliance for moving cases into status 02 and 96% for moving cases into status 10. It may be a lot of people on this call who are wondering what is that, and if this is you

and you are interested in discussing this to acquire knowledge, we can definitely talk offline later.

Budget - all year last year what we talked about mainly was just getting bills in timely and paying our providers timely. We are continuing those efforts doing a lot of training with our providers who are interested, so that they can get paid timely. We want to make sure the money we obligate is being invoiced against. We don't want to leave money on the table at the end of the fiscal year.

Some of the providers on the call, we have been reaching out to you most about your language services. I want to point out that we are collaborating with Wyss Wellness Center. These individuals service the immigrant community. Our Executive Director came to Philadelphia last year and we talked extensively about unserved and underserved populations and so the Wyss Wellness Center is one of the entities where they have a large number of individuals who are unserved. What we have found is that we have paperwork and brochures that explain who we are and our services that need to be translated into various languages. Someone else in a higher pay grade than me is working on that, but what I am doing on a local level with staff is reaching out to a lot of vendors and providers asking them who do you have on staff that speaks any other language other than English and if you don't have any staff that speaks other languages, how are you communicating with individuals who do not speak English whether it's a language service or not sure what else is out there, but we are collecting this information and hope to be able share that with anybody who is interested in the information that we are collecting.

Kathy Fogel:

Transition Unit Update - we have a new transportation provider agreement with CIS that will assist our customers with transportation whether adult or student via SEPTA Pass, Uber, Lyft and CCT. They have been kind enough to sign this provider agreement and Shari, Shanae in Norristown and a few other people are working on the document to make sure staff understand the process. We really appreciate CIS signing this agreement.

The other PRE-ETS Services our Transition Team, ERC and (3) VRCs along with their supervisor, continuously accepting IEP Meeting Invites on a regular basis which most are virtual. The ERCs are continuing with their group services. There is a lot of self-advocacy groups that have been in-person and virtual our counselors are working on providing services such as job shadows and paid work experiences to our students. We don't have that many students doing paid work experiences, one of the counselors reported that we just don't want to do that right now, because of COVID, but we do continue to meet with them virtually and in person and do our (5) required services for counseling and guidance and post-secondary counseling.

Suzanne moved on after BVRs report to ask for any updates on the discussion we had during our last meeting, regarding mobility services and payment? Has any agreement reached with SEPTA? Has that changed?

Alexander Shay responded with he will address this in BBVS report.

UPDATE FROM PHILADELPHIA BBVS:

Alexander Shay:

Alex began with picking up from Shari and Kathy, we are still working through this most recent COVID spike and Omicron virus. Our staff are doing our best to keep our spirits up and we certainly following any/all, if there are any cases, Office of Administration Quarantine Guidelines. We are still up and running during this time and hopeful that this will start to evade and things will begin to resume a little more like normal.

Human Resources - the District Administrator position is still in progress, as far the hiring. There haven't been any recent updates with this.

We do have (1) Social Worker now and fortunately we did have another posting for another Social Worker that went up and came down, and we are in the process of scheduling interviews for this position which I am very excited about because that is very important to us in covering the (5) county Philly area which is the largest population area in Pennsylvania.

We also have the Vision Rehab Therapist position posting that went up, as well as another CT-2 position which we can benefit from as well with only having (2) right now which has been the case for a couple years.

OOS Update - we still have cases on the list, but at least it is starting to whittle down which is what we want to see. The order has been closed since last July and a lot of times when customers are still on there its because calls they haven't followed up or returned calls to the counselors, thus the counselors need to make an active effort to get that person to get a plan done or close the case out realistically. So it's a case management issue.

Training - with regards to OVR wide, there has been ongoing training on what's known as the Credential Attainment & Measurable Skill Gains. Basically, this is just a better way for the counselors to capture kind of skill and credential attainment from customers such as degrees, vocational certificates, and trades, so that the data can be better captured for RSA reporting which is critical. This is part of the law.

ILOB Update - we also recently, in BBVS, at the end of the year and really its being piloted now, there has been some changes with the ILOB Independent Living Older Blind Program, as far as just the coding. What was once one codes is now (6) fund codes which is, honestly, annoying, but that's what RSA wanted us to have to better track different streams of how it is being used whether it's for training, outreach, etc., so this is something that we had to incorporate. Our staff do daily activity reports just for accountability and as such there were some tweaks and changes there to incorporate that.

Our ILOB Funding has been notoriously very limited. Last year 2021 it was raised to \$2,500/case with some exceptions from \$500 a couple years past. This year in 2022 our Director just made a decision using all the attained information as best we can and our funding went down a little bit to \$1,500/case which is still more than \$500, but its just a flat funded program that in

Central Office they do what they can to make sure that at least we can service as many customers as possible with what resources we have.

SEPTA Update - yes, Suzanne that can affect anyone with a disability. It particularly fell hard on blind and visually impaired customers which we talked about last time, and not just BBVS and O&M instructors, but also Veterans Administration and School District.

To recap this issue, last June SEPTA terminated the SEPTA Pass Program which was a complimentary service provided to our staff who travel train our customers on just how to use SEPTA. They are not really going anywhere, but rather just showing them how to use different routes so they can be successful and as one O&M instructor explained to me, we are really doing SEPTA a favor, because instead of overloading the Paratransit system, because of a customer who too concerned or scared about tripping or falling, we are helping them to use public transportation. So what we had to scramble is to figure out what we are going to do. In past month or so, I have been working with our director Rod Alcidonis and we are currently exploring how using our office purchasing card to allow our staff to have these SEPTA cards for travel training purpose, so we are developing procedures on how to do that because we make sure everything is done appropriately. This is out-of-the box, but we needed a temporary solution help our customers who need to get to places, get to work, get to their doctor's appointment, supermarket, etc. Not everyone might use SEPTA, but it's a service we have been doing for many years, decades as part of our process and rehabilitation to help our blind and visually impaired customers get to where they need to go independently.

Suzanne stated with regards to how the payment for the customers that are being trained for travel training, is BBVS or OVR paying for their travel?

Shay responded with yes this is in the works, this is not in place yet, but basically there will be (2) cards, one for the instructor and one for the customer and the staff will hold on to the customer card. The staff will have to swipe their card and the customer will swipe the provided card just to purely get through the SEPTA terminal. This is crucial for our customers on fixed income.

Suzanne stressed the importance of this for customers who are trying to get to employment and learning how to get to their potential jobs.

Suzanne then thanked both Alex, Shari or Kathy, for their reports and asked if there are any questions for both reports.

Shari Brightful addressed to Alex in your update for Order of Selection, just so I have the notes correctly, are you saying that you still have BBVS customers on the waitlist or are they customers who came off and when we notified them they were off the waitlist they just haven't responded so that we can move them in plan status? I want to make sure that we are clear that we don't still have people on the waitlist.

Alex responded with it's the latter its just really the system is in Status 11. They are still showing up in the system which we have a special status 11 Order of Selection which our counselors are trying to chip away at to resolve.

Suzanne then asked if there is any way that the people can help with that, like maybe the various chapters of PCB and NFB. Wondering if PA could say to their chapter members, if you happen to be on a waiting list of any kind, please be sure to get in touch with your counselor.

Shay responded with there is not that many, it only like 20 or so people.

Suzanne responded with 20 is 20, if we can help with that that's 20 people that may be able to get a job and that's important.

Alex chimed in with back in July we were instructed and sent out letters to all customers on this list and there has been corrective efforts to reach out to them by whatever information we have. Sometimes people move or change phone numbers, I am not sure, but we can do that, but our counselors are already using physical means to contact using mail, email or phone numbers and its just really a follow up, but with our caseloads there are very active participants, some that are so so and some that are not really. It's just the nature it. We are moving some of those cases, though somewhat embarrassing to still have cases there which Central Office is not happy about, but we are trying to move along there with what we must get that to 0.

Suzanne is just worried that in some instances if you are just printing and mailing letters to some of these people and they are not able to get people to read them quickly enough or they may be isolated. Sometimes we might be able to reach people in ways that you can't, not that you want to give us any names.

We can just mention this in chapter meetings, "If you know anybody you think might be using/eligible for services and they may be on a waiting list of some kind, please let people know to contact their contact person. Sometimes they may forget or lost contact information. If they could do some of the stuff that Lynn and I do for example, they may not need rehab services.

One of the things that we really run into a lot is just keeping membership of our organizations apprised of what's going on and if we are having trouble reaching people, I can only imagine what must be going on in your offices. You have high caseloads and it is hard to get in touch with people who are really isolated.

Suzanne Erb:

Suzanne then began to give a brief report to the committee. She informed the committee that officially she is going to be taking on a new role, as of February 14, 2022, where she will be the Disability Navigator at CareerLink. This is the CareerLink operated by JEVs Human Services, at 1617 JFK Blvd here in Philadelphia which just happens to be very close to where she lives.

She is really looking forward to this opportunity. She has always been really interested in CareerLink and always loved the idea of working with people who have all kinds of disabilities, especially in a non-disability related office.

She is hoping that she will still be able to work with the committee, maybe in a different capacity. We will see what happens.

She will probably want to ask all for input in terms of things that you think you would like to work on and partner with CareerLink, as well as implementing.

Everyone congratulated.

Alex was wondering if after she gets her feet in at CareerLink and gets situated, if what other benefits could help BBVS that would benefit us. I don't know if we have done the best job at reaching out to CareerLink, as far as BBVS, thus any opportunities, I would love a future collaboration.

Shari chimed in with they put out a report each year that combines with us and I don't think our customers BBVS or BVRS or Office of Death & Hard of Hearing are well reflected. She believes that they have definitely tried their best to capture and reflect which of our customers receive services from CareerLink, but I really think that a conversation with Suzanne and us would definitely help. I think that our customers severely underutilize a great resource over at CareerLink.

Shari went on to say that she is really excited and happy for Suzanne and that her now being at CareerLink is definitely going to be an asset for them, and we can do some great things together, because our customers could definitely benefit from both agencies being of service to them.

Suzanne agreed and stated that the more she learns about CareerLink the more of assistance she can be.

She has a lot of database management systems that we use training which she is hoping is accessible. Also, all the programs that JEVS has, she needs to learn can be very useful.

This position's plan is that they are hoping to implement this amongst various workforces throughout the state, so it will be interesting to see how this pans out, as well as see what the requirements are for the position. I really hope it's a position with some meat, so that whoever is in that position will really be able to adequately serve the needs of people with disabilities in the area and to really work collaboratively with OVR offices and all the other mandated offices.

All contact information will be given once she is officially in the office. It is her intention to remain active with the Philadelphia Employment First Steering Committee. This will fulfill the desire to have someone from CareerLink on this committee.

She will let CAC committee know if any changes with her position here will need to happen which she hopes there will be none.

VISSIONS Update:

VISIONS has PA Family Networks who does a whole lot of different trainings and workshops. We give trainings on waivers and updates which was a two part series and we still have a lot of other things we do like Philadelphia Parent Support Group which we have different sectors throughout the city where we do training or rather information sessions where we get specialists to come in and talk about different topics. We recently did a training in the Northeast, where she is over this section of the city, on Emergency Preparedness, because a lot of families saying and thinking that they are ready are not. You have to make sure that you have the main things that you need in place, especially a “to go” bag. We don’t even think about that “to go” bag should we have to get out quickly. If our loved ones get lost, do we something in place to help them reach out to a professional, a police officer or a firefighter or someone that they know that they can connect with if they are separated at some point. It’s just a whole lot and medication another red flag, you need to those medications to get the extra to put in that bag as a refresher as needed.

Prior to this training last year we did Emergency Awareness and everyone at VISIONS gave away some emergency kits with everything it for an emergency. One was a backpack that had the water, gloves and masks. A second one contained a box of mask and a box of gloves, hand sanitizer, washable and reusable masks. We had a lot of different things in the bags that you could use. Something you could put around your neck to put your id in a little cash, cards, etc.

There is just a lot going on at VISIONS and you are welcome to visit our website at workingforequality.org. and you can see all the different things that we have going on at present, such as different things about the waiver, about different programs that we are doing, and we have a family network training page that you can go on which will give you everything that you need, numbers to the office of ODP, Severial Autisim, we have information about if you need an advocate to advocate for you, on your behalf, knowing your rights, all that information. We jobs and job training assistance is also on there, as well and so much more. She and her colleague just developed a program for Early Intervention to try to help families navigate through the systems, especially the ones severely diagnosed and do not know where to look for services and support. This is what we do and do not charge anything. Everything is free of charge. Our passion is just helping families. This is called Invisions Possibilities under VISIONS for quality.

VISIONS will forward emails with any/all updates to Alex and Shari.

Damon Johnson came on and just reported Temple University is without a Director at present.

CIS is continuously hiring, thus utilize their website.

Suzanne stated that the Steering Committee is working on putting together and developing a video that is really aimed at encouraging people to consider this line of work as a career.

Next CAC Meeting Monday, April 24, 2022 which will be confirmed once Suzanne is settled at her new job.