

**Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
October 25, 2021
MINUTES**

Suzanne Erb/Networks for Training & Development, Kathy Fogel/BVRS, Alexander Shay/BBVS, Lynn Heitz/ASB, Shari Brightful/BVRS, Andrew Pennington/CAP, Damon Johnson/Temple University, Joan Nelson/Visions, Joan Nelson, Nikita Arnette/Network for Training & Development, June Waters-Bey, Melissa Good, Sandra Healey

WELCOME:

Suzanne Erb opened the meeting at 10:10 a.m. starting by thanking all for joining the call and introductions of all in attendance.

She continued with asking if all have had an opportunity to review the minutes from last meeting and asked for a motion of acceptance of the minutes which motion was made and second and accepted.

Suzanne then went on to introduce our guest speaker who is Nikita Arnette/Networks for Training & Development who will be talking about initiatives that are happening in the city regarding the Employment First Steering Committee and just some general updates about Phila On The Job website.

PRESENTATION

Earlier this month on October 6th, we had an Employment First Stakeholder Event. Some of you may have been at this meeting in the past. We traditionally held it in the fall and the last one was at the Independence Visitors Center back in October of 2019. This is a chance for all stakeholders parents, families, provider agencies, IDS, ODP, OVR and self-advocates to come together and plan out a strategic plan or what we have been calling a pack.

Back in 2019 when we met at the Independence Visitors Center we decided on our strategic plan “Connecting Talent To Opportunities” and we had (5) different workgroups back then that came together to plan out some goals. They wanted to accomplish this between October of 2019 to November of this year. When we met earlier this month, it was like a check-in to see how we were doing on those goals, as well as develop our new strategic plan that goes from this month until October of 2023 which is so weird to think about because my brain is still processing 2020.

So I will give you a little recap of where we were back in 2019 and then tell you a little bit more about the workgroup and goals that we have for the next two years.

Back in 2018 the (5) workgroups that we had were Marketing, Benefits, Organizational Change, Talent Management and Self Practices & Training.

A few of the goals that the groups had back then were as follows:

The Marketing work group really wanted to focus on creating an Employment First campaign which would focus on real people and real stories about them working and utilizing Phila On The Job. I remember we wanted to have a huge photo shoot in front of the Philadelphia Art Museum steps and of course that didn't happen, because as you all know a few months after this meeting the pandemic started and everything sort of shifted. I am happy to share that the Marketing team did accomplish a huge goal with creating the Filler On The Job video which some of you may or may not have seen yet. I can link it to you and can also forward the link to Suzanne to send out, but it's a video that features (11) individuals who live and/or work in Philadelphia and they are just sharing what Employment First means to them and what work means to them. It's meant to spread awareness of Employment First and why we should all be committed to it and believe in it.

The next group is the Benefits work group they back in 2019 wanted to create a toolkit that included a number of documents, videos and information that could be used by teachers, schools, people with disabilities and providers. They also wanted to do stuff regarding the spellings and myths around work. People hear a lot that if you work you are going to lose your benefits and things like that, so they wanted to dispel that. That workgroup actually created a short podcast series all about benefits which Suzanne Erb has had a major hand in this, which there are currently (4) episodes. One has to do with Social Security in time and how work impacts your social security benefits and there's one about Medicaid, one episode with Disability Rights of Pennsylvania and then another episode around Impairment Related Work Expenses. I believe with Suzanne they are working on a few more episodes cause we can go on and on about benefits. So again, I can and will share links to all this stuff and Suzanne can share them as well.

The other group is Organizational Change. This 3rd group is the big beef of the workgroups of the goals and they were focused on building an infrastructure to support the collection of employment success stories and all about story telling and strengthening people's ability to tell their stories.

Then we have the Talent Management workgroup who wanted to focus on getting more information out there about this field which is still very much hidden from like the outside world somehow. It's very frustrating that people don't know more about this field, so this why this workgroup wanted to tackle and provide training workgroups to get more information out there about employment first and getting family stories out there and they actually recorded a presentation about what employment first is, the history behind it and why families and self-advocates and everybody should believe in it, as well as how to get connected to this system.

So that was the planning teams and our goals from 2019 to this year and we have accomplished a good amount of them.

This year, just a few weeks ago, when we met, we decided to combine some of the workgroups and introduce a new one which really isn't that new but it's been in the conversation before, and we realized we didn't have it in for the last initiative which is

the Transition Coordination Counsel, and we were missing the transition keys from our 2019 goals. So when we met a few weeks ago, the name of our strategic plan for the next two years is “Employment for All/It’s Time” which I think is a real clear and distinct declaration that “It’s Time Yall”, and I know you all know this that people outside of the system they need to know that people with disabilities want to work, they can work and should be able to work and why are there so many barriers to prevent them from acquiring work.

We have (4) workgroups for the next two years which are as follows:

One is them is the Marketing Talent Workers which is just the (2) groups combined, and we wanted to focus more on talent. Talent meaning, people with disabilities getting jobs, as well as people who support people with disabilities to get those jobs which is very important. We are also working on another video that we are calling “A Day In The Life of An Employment Support Professional.” We are interviewing (2) job coaches about what this work is like and why people should become job coaches or employment support professionals. We should start filming in two to three weeks which we have (2) really great job coaches, one from CIS and another from RAC that will be in the video. I am excited to get this started and for all to see and to use as a recruiting tool to get more people into the field.

The Organization Change Workgroup is still around and have an event coming up on November 10, 2021. They’re trying to put a toolkit together for families and self-advocates and still focusing on the story telling and how to tell your stories in an impactful way. Just overall trying to get people’s hearts and get them to believe in Employment First. Their whole thing is helping to identify employment champions is what they are calling them.

There’s the Education & Engagement Workgroup which is kind of like the benefits and practices workgroups combined. They wanted develop additional training tools which can be used by stakeholders to support a culture of Employment First.

The Transitioning Coordinating Counsel Workgroup that focuses on planning and facilitating successful transition for people with disabilities from school to adult life.

Those are the (4) Workgroups for the next 2 years and during the stakeholder’s event on October 6, 2021 we actually went into different breakout rooms to plan out what our goals are for the next 2 years and what we hope to accomplish by this time next year and then this time in two years.

The Marketing Talent Workgroup meets as needed, especially with this video coming up, but the other workgroups, I believe, meet monthly. I know the Transition Coordinating Workgroup meets monthly, but there is a lot of work to be done. If any of the workgroups sounds interesting or appealing to you, we are always accepting members to join and give good ideas and help connect with others who can help us accomplish the goals we have set out to achieve.

We do have a new pack that reflects all of the goals that we have set out, but that hasn't been finalized quite yet, Jessica Stovers from Networks Personal Development is actually working on it, and we can send it out, once its finished, so that we are all on the same page about what we want to accomplish in the next 2 years.

That is the big overview of what happened at the stakeholder event this year, and I am looking forward to getting to the work and accomplishing our goals.

The other thing is that all of this information is on the Phila On The Job website which I can put in the chat and slip you all a send out. We have the podcast episodes on the this website, the training presentation available and all the website, as well as all the materials from the stakeholder event, including the recording available and we also have another section which is all about ending resources, so any of the presentations that we have done this month will be available there. That's where you will find the stakeholder event information, a recording of self-advocates, American Substance on Being Essential Workers. We have heard so much about essential workers in the past 2 years and all the work that they have done, but not so much hearing from people with disabilities who also essential workers and what it's been like for them. That recording is on the website, as well. We will also, once it's available, have last weeks recording of the Employment Forum featuring Absey and Acre and the importance of certification and why people should try to get their CFP or ACRE certification. We also have an event that is happening live this week that's all about the business perspective which is happening on Wednesday the 27th at 2PM and has Darla Wilkerson from the Center for Disabilities Inclusion and Shari Patrick from Great Southern Bank talking about how hiring practices have shifted during the pandemic, some of the strategies that are accommodations for working remotely and how many practices will continue. So, if you are free on Wednesday at 2PM make sure to check that out.

Suzanne ask would it be possible to get the registration information for Wednesday, because I think that it would be really great for people to attend?

Nikita/Presenter responded with YES and she will forward to Suzanne for distribution. She asked that link be sent out to everyone once it is in the chat.

Suzanne invited all to check out the calendar for any/all events that they may want to register to attend.

However, Nikita/Presenter responded with that is a good question. She attends the steering committee meetings, when she can, that we hold monthly with IDS and we try and share information with her to share with OVR, in case there's an event that it makes sense for an OVR representative to attend. I don't think we really ask OVR to send things through there listers or I haven't seen it, but if OVR is open to that, we can share that info for sure.

Suzanne stated that she believes that there are certain things that OVR could be helping with.

Kathy Fogel chimed in with Shari does release this information. We do have a point of contact for ODP and ID Sonali Patel/Supervisor and two VRCs Ralph Zuccarino and Brenda Tingstrom that work with our ID population, as well as Sharon Silverman/Supervisor is our point of contact for the Employment Forum.

Suzanne did ask is there anything that OVR would like to see the steering committee do more of which may be something that you may need to think about and get back to us.

Kathy agreed and stated she would talk with Shari Brightful about this.

Suzanne stated that it would really be great to have OVR present at the meetings, as much as possible.

Kathy then asked Nikita to email her more information about the workgroups to share with supervisors and staff at staff meeting.

Nakita/Presenter agreed.

Suzanne thanked Nikita for joining us and providing us with such useful information.

Nikita/Presenter ended with if anyone wants to get in contact with her or wants more information on workgroups and things like that, you can feel free to email her at nikitaa@networksfortraining.org

Suzanne inserted that they are always looking for people to join workgroups and you do not have to be a member of the steering committee to work on a workgroup, so if you are interested, please get in contact with us.

BVRS REPORT (Kathy Fogel/ADA, BVRS Philadelphia)

Hiring

We were able to give (2) unconditional offers for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs). They have to go through the finger printing and background checks and then be cleared before we can give them the final offer. We are so excited to get back in the groove with this and these two individuals hopefully will be part of our transition team.

Goals

We received our goals for this fiscal year and our office goal is 588 individuals that we want to help achieve competitive integrated employment. So, this is our goal.

Fiscal

We continue to work with providers and vendors regarding any/all invoices that need to be paid. Mostly we have supportive employment invoices, but we do have other services and we recently had a virtual meeting with the providers last Tuesday, October 19th and we had a quite a good turnout. We were able to spotlight all the providers and here their updates. There were a lot of

staffing changes and there were a lot of delays due to COVID, but now its just the opposite, since there are now so many employers hiring, so providers are scrambling for staff too and it sound like they are hiring. What is important is that there are jobs out there for our customers, so we are hoping to move forward with that and at the same time make sure that we are being invoiced in a timely manner.

Transition

We developed a new team back in April and changed the office to go to zip codes. So, all referrals that come in through our pre-applications are being assigned to our counselors based on regions and zip codes. So, if a transition has (3) vocational counselors have split the regions in Philadelphia. They have been busy going to the schools that they can go to, while also providing IEP virtually. Our IEPs come through a resource account for the School District of Philadelphia and the Charter Schools send emails.

We have (2) Early Reach Coordinators/ERCs that continue to do virtual group presentations whether its on one of the 5 required services or an OVR 101 and the also do the IEPs. They are mostly our students that are potentially eligible not the open cases.

We have (1) Business Services Representative/BSR for our pre-app students and she helps us develop resources and employers that can hopefully move into a paid work experience for our students.

Sharon Silverman is our Point of Contact and supervises this team.

We have been busy in July with new pre-apps pre-employment transition services 2.0 in our computer system CWDS. We have been receiving tons of good training in this implementation that has several updates to it too. It's one of our biggest system updates since CWDS started in 2017.

So we have busy with transition and we were able to provide virtual ESY/Extended School Year group services and one professional connection experience. It's a new provider agreement over the summer with Jeremy DeLotus where they saw (10) students where they were able there first week to provide some soft skills training and the second week I think it was a van they rented and we paid for all of it, thus the students got to visit different sites throughout Philadelphia to see what different experiences are out there for them.

We hope to continue this, though it has been difficult with COVID, especially with transportation with students getting back and forth from school, but we are working on providing services.

Andrew asked a question, in regard to goals. He wanted to know where we are this year in comparison to last year's goals, and where did we finish the last fiscal year in regards to a percentage of your goals?

Kathy responded with last year was approximately 464 she believes, and we were about 56%.

Andrew then asked on that note has the referral streams changed any since the Order of Selection has been opened for MSD and can you talk about how Absey was affected also with regards to the ways of coming off the Order of Selection?

Kathy responded with referral streams have been consistent, but lower. I was suppose to have a meeting with the supervisors last Thursday to take a look at the referrals via zip codes and check the balance of it and unfortunately we didn't have that meeting, so hopefully I can review with them this Thursday, so we can take a look at the numbers and where the referrals are coming from since April and that can help us in taking a look at what areas we need to target or which areas are lower.

Kathy then asked Andrew to repeat his second question again, so that she may provide an answer.

Andrew replied with its my understanding that as of September 9, 2021 everyone who was on the significantly disabled wait list were released for services. How many was that?

Kathy stated she would have to go to the spreadsheet for that information and look it up, but would be glad to forward information. We are addressing all that come off this list, contacting them and trying to setup an IPE meeting with them since they were all in Status 11 in the IPEs.

BBVS REPORT (Alexander Shay/Acting DA, BVRS Philadelphia)

Alex started with piggy banking off Andrew's question and ran some numbers as far as VR goals.

Goals

Last year we had 46 closures out of a goal of 69 which was 67%. This was not bad, I believe we were like in 2nd in the state out of all offices. Offices statewide had a very hard time meeting their goals. Our goals are a little higher at 105, but we will still plug away.

Referrals

Just looking at September cause the Order of Selection has been eliminated, since July 1st we have had 24 VR referrals in September verses the previous year at 0. We noticed the trend is a little higher, but something to just keep an eye on, where it obviously should be easier for customers to apply, get the application and get the plan going.

Staffing

We are very pleased, and I put this on top, that we have a Social Worker who started which last time we spoke we didn't have. Now we have one and her name is Ina Cloredantzler who started working August 30, 2021, so she is still in a training probationary status and things are going well. Also, to support Ina in that role we have one of our VR counselors who is serving in a temporary supervising compacity since mid-September. As a result of her doing this role, we still have her existing VR caseload which is being handled in overtime. I feel that clearly staff is important, and this has made a significant difference in phone calls being answered and customers being served. Definitely better than when there was no department just myself and Giovanna trying to address these calls.

So, with Ina right now, we are just trying to focus on a smaller caseload and building up from there and then triaging any other cases that come through that need attention.

The DA position, I do not have a timeline as to when that will be posted. This position has been vacant now for 8 months now going on 9. Definitely the plans are to post this position, and also I would hope to get another Social Worker obviously, because we originally had 4 and now we only have 1 whose in training.

It is very critical, obviously we are a significant metropolitan area in the U.S. and the independent living and specialized services programs are critical for children, seekers and adults who are not able to work.

Fiscal

We just closed our fiscal year as of September 30, 2021 and there were no real issues doing that, but just a more of an administrative part there was an RSA audit on ILOB and now to frustrate us further which is something we need to do is that our funding stream for ILOB will be broken down into 6 different fund codes. This was as of October 1, 2021. So, we are going to get training to come forth with that and then there will be some CWDS changes that we have to wait until February for that to take effect, because there is so many different patches in CWDS regarding VR and other matters, so that is just the timeline for that and ILOB changes will probably effect the services provided form and the way we do closures.

I didn't see the audit, but I know that we were told as an agency that we need to better track where that money is going for ILOB.

Since March 2020 through July 2021 we were on a temporary teleworking situation and then July 2021 through early September we were all returning into the office what we have in place now and this is also with BVRS we have telework agreements in place up to 2 days a week for staff to use, based on their eligibility, suitability and operational needs. However, a lot of our staff are taking advantage of that. It's been a little adjustment for us because we have staff in the office and staff at home where we have to assume people are teleworking and not off, so communication is even more important which I believe we are adjusting well to this.

Sometimes in your own professions you might find that it is easier to have in person meetings verses phone to kind of have a better dynamic, for example our staff meeting which is better in person.

Our staff are working and have always been working, because I know that has been an issue with the public. They have phones, they have their equipment and everyone brings their laptops home with them every day, and if you are teleworking and you have to see a client, then you have to see a client that's fine, it's just your base of operations for that day will be your house.

There was a recent change that Suzanne and Lynn may be aware of, there was a law signed by Governor Wolf on September 27, 2021 at 1:31 which allows visually impaired residents of

Pennsylvania to use bi-optic telescope lens to drive. I have learned that this was already in effect in 46 other states, and we were one of the latter ones to get this approved.

You need to meet the criteria, have an official acuity less than 20 over 100 combined but at least 20 over 200 in the better eye to qualify. You have to get an exam from an optometrist, you have to have these lens for at least 3 months and here's the part that could be affecting us at BBVS, but is under legal review now which it looks like is basically have our own O&M instructors, if there permitted, to do 10 hours of front seat passenger instruction with the customers. Both of our instructors did attend a several month training which wasn't all at once, but rather broken up, on how to do this. So, this is under legal review and there is restrictions on what these people with this lens can do.

They can only drive during daylight, they are limited to roads rather than freeways and they can only drive passenger vehicles under 10,000 lbs.

There's already been a lot of interest with our staff getting calls from doctors and customers expressing interest in this, but as far as our role, we are not able to do this just yet. You can imagine the tremendous legal liability here with regard to someone trying to drive and then our O&M instructors are now responsible for making sure they drive safely.

I think this is an interesting development for visually impaired customers to gain a little independence and after talking with one instructor, obviously we have a public transportation system here SEPTA, but there's certain parts of the state that really don't, and this could make a difference to getting a job successfully where the only way to get around is to drive.

Lastly, back in June, SEPTA, unfortunately ended a program that we had with them where our instructors would get passes for staff and customers to use for travel training and how to use SEPTA buses, subways, trolleys, regional rail safely at no cost to BBVS. This is not really being taken well around here. So, we have been asked to work with a provider in the system "Travelers Aid" to kind of work out the travel passes or the reloadable cards to see if we can get for customers, but you know it's a hassle obviously where we were having our customers trained safely, so they wouldn't have to be dependent on Paratransit, because they are concerned about slipping and falling on a train platform.

Funding was the reasoning for SEPTA, since the pandemic they have had a drop in ridership and they were looking at ways to cut costs to the detriment of our customers.

Suzanne asked as members of consumer organizations and Andrew could this be a good issue for CAP, even though it may not be individual focused, because it is in a way. Might not this be a good project for all of us to work on together? This really does impact peoples safety and ability to travel.

Lynn stated that someone reached out to me about this issue and I actually have a position on the SEPTA Advisory Committee. I brought this up with them, and it turns out that our O&M instructors are not the only individuals who get these passes. Every OT in Philadelphia SEPTA was providing a pass for, because the reality is it's not only individuals that are blind or visually impaired that need assistance, but there are people with other disabilities also needed assistance.

So we are talking about almost \$700, 000 that SEPTA was losing by providing these passes, as well as the student passes, because there were two. So one for the instructor and one for the student. So, at this time they are not interested in re-engaging that program which is unfortunate.

Lynn followed up with she doesn't think there is a recourse at this point with SEPTA, unless Andrew has any suggestions.

Andrew stated that he would have to talk with Steve about that as far as how to go about this, especially since I am just learning about this the Director of CAP. He did agree with Lynn in that it might not be the right time now, but its not something in the future that we can't bring up, thus once he speaks with Steve he will reach out to all.

The next CAC meeting is on 1/24/22 at 10:00 AM

UPDATES/ANNOUNCEMENTS