

Minutes for the Pittsburgh CAC meeting of February 1, 2019

The meeting was held at the BBVS office in Pittsburgh at 531 Penn Avenue, First Floor at 10:00 a.m. on Feb. 1, 2019.

In attendance were at the office:

Shannon Austin, BBVS District Administrator; Larry Shock, BBVS Assistant District Administrator; Spero Pipakis, BBVS Business Services Rep to help place clients; Chris Hunsinger, Secretary; Tom Burgunder, CAC member. Also in attendance via telephone: Joe Wassermann, CAC member and co-chair of the CAC; Mike Zaken, co-chair of the CAC; Carla Hayes, CAC member; and Emily Gindlesperger, CAC Member and parent.

Chris Hunsinger got there ten minutes late because of weather and traffic so she doesn't know who made and seconded the motion to accept the November 2018 meeting minutes.

Joe Wassermann brought up the reminder that we all need to be aware of the items that were mentioned in a meeting with expectation of a report at a future meeting. He gave the example that Barb Peterson from BVRSP had said that they were thinking about additional White Cane events for the future around White Cane Day, but since she isn't at the meeting, Joe tasked Mike with the duty to talk to her at the next BVRSP Board Meeting about that issue.

Joe also brought up the item that Tom Burgunder was to get an answer regarding ADA regulations for clearance between exhibit tables, etc. for future planning of BBVS events to be held in conjunction with the PCB Fall Conference. Tom had not yet made it through the snow for the meeting, but he got there later.

Joe asked Shannon about the Employment First initiative and whether it has resulted in any hiring changes for clients of BBVS yet. She said that there has been little direction in this area. OVR, ODP, DHS, and PennDOT will be agencies that might figure by providing most of the jobs for disabled people. With Acting Directors in both OVR and BBVS Central Office, no plan has been pushed forward yet. All agencies have been tasked to work collaboratively to increase employment outcomes. There is no report for the public as of February 1, 2019. It is likely that we will hear more in the Spring. Governor's awards and the Workforce Development Conference are likely to generate more information about this initiative.

We then turned to the contract that Keystone has at Boyers to place visually impaired employees in the record maintenance department there. Since those jobs are contract jobs with a Federal agency and they are National Industries for the Blind jobs under Ability One, they count as closures to BBVS if they are found after assessment to be competitive, integrated employment. Since the Erie office has placed people in some of those positions and did an assessment, the positions were found to be eligible to be counted as closures.

Next on Joe's agenda was the question of whether or which jobs are now available to be applied for without using a Civil Service test as Ryan Hyde mentioned in November at the ACBP conference call. Ryan had said that the new system would be up and running in January 2019.

Shannon told us that Neogov is indeed working and some of the jobs that used to require testing now no longer require it. Shannon gave the example of Business Service Rep. She will send out a link to the Neogov site.

The OVR Director position closed at the end of December 2018 and as of February 1, 2019 there was no indication of whether interviewing had started for that position. The Central Office BBVS director position won't be filled until after the OVR Director is decided.

Shannon continued with the staffing report. In OVR as of January, there is Mandatory overtime because of staffing shortages. PETS (Pre-employment Transition Services) money each year is \$20 million. Fifteen percent (15%) of budget goes to PETS students ages 14 to 21 in high school. OVR is to work on five key services: job readiness, independent living, self-advocacy, job shadowing, and work-based learning experience. The \$20 million a year was allowed to roll over at the beginning of WIOA because the PETS programs were not yet in place to spend it. So there was at some time as much as \$40 million available for PETS. That surplus is no longer available. It has been spent. This \$20 million a year is for all of OVR, and each BBVS office gets its piece. BBVS has been using some of this money for the Summer Academy, part of the Junior Summer Academy and the STEM events. Some auxiliary aids for students to be able to participate in programs are paid for from the PETS money. Some school districts encourage their students to get equipment by becoming clients of OVR or BBVS while other districts provide equipment. But if the district provides it, the equipment often gets turned in at the end of the school year. Different districts have differing ability to pay for equipment so some children may get their equipment from the State and others may get it from the district.

Last Fall there was to be \$15.8 million available from Federal money, but this money was projected out of sweep-up money, and the money that is usually turned back to the Federal government from the States wasn't as much as in the past. That impacted OVR activities, lowering the amount of overtime allowed to work caseloads. Training is turning into tele-training or video conferences instead of face-to-face, and limiting travel for employees. What other cost savings can OVR institute? Time coding in the office is changing so that it can more accurately put the costs for service into the proper program. A service provider letter went out from Ryan Hyde telling providers they will be re-evaluated - looking at Provision Models and agreements to determine if changes need to be made. Work-based learning will be a bigger part of PETS since research shows that students are 2.5 times more likely to become employed after graduation if they have such an experience in their lives. Overall, there will be less money available for PETS in 2019. OVR is re-evaluating priority of service to take into account changes in funding levels.

OVR staff is currently working on existing PETS plans and on determining if programs can continue to be authorized and if additional programs can be authorized. This office has to do a projection of costs for future implementation of PETS. They are trying to project costs through June 2019 and then for July 2019 onward. There were in the past contracts for some services and group services from contract providers. There are 130 providers throughout the Commonwealth providing some level of PETS service. In more rural areas, there is some limit to the available providers.

Tom asked if this is all related to budget. For Junior Academy, no iPads to go home with this summer.

Chris brought up the Mississippi State question for study at the NRTC of whether this money for PETS is getting results.

Shannon said that OVR and the Department of Education may well have to have such a conversation about student resources and who provides what. Emily pointed out that frequently school districts don't have students taking equipment home for the summer. Spero said that it depends on how the IEP is written some of the time. Some districts don't even provide braille writers for the students.

Joe requested that we actually get someone from the IUs or an administrator from school systems responsible for the children so we can better understand how PETS and schools can work together. IU and school districts have contracts to pay the IU for services.

Shannon with staff update: She introduced Spero with his new position. He feels very welcomed in the organization. He is the first Business Service Rep in BBVS. OVR in their offices already have Business Service Rep units. Spero will be meeting with the BSR people in the other OVR offices that this BBVS office overlaps with. He hopes that they can work collaboratively together. The Washington, New Castle and Johnstown offices have a Business Service Rep. There are people who want to stay put in rural areas so it is important for him to work with the OVR Business Service Reps. Spero is starting virtual Job Readiness programs that might turn into Job clubs that would be support groups for job seekers. He will be working with the rehabilitation counselors to train them and discuss what might be important. Job readiness may include child care, transportation, back-up transportation, what happens to Disability and SSI benefits if a consumer goes to work. He is getting onto job lists such as community colleges, hospitals and counties themselves. Spero checked with the people in Arkansas that used to do the IRS training. He spoke with the President and CEO Sharon Julinazzo, who told him that in 2017 they closed down the IRS training because of the Federal job freeze. They changed their training to teaching people to be credit counselors. They are on the Pennsylvania approved vendors list.

Joe asked about whether the Social Security training program was affected. Chris explained that Social Security has been doing training inhouse for years. Their office that provides equipment for disabled employees covers the whole agency. The local office where the person is to work could well need to hire an assistant or reader or whatever that person may be, like an attendant for someone with severe mobility impairments.

Spero wants to get a job club started up in March or April of 2019 for candidates to work.

In the Spring Shannon hopes they can get an ADA specialist to work through the training modules to respond to employers about things like etiquette and other ADA issues.

Shannon wants to work with the counselors to help them learn how to best use the Business Services Rep. Things like when to look for a job coach, OJT, tax credits, where and when to change client status.

Spero will be part of the meetings when staff is talking about people who are job ready so that he can know what to do about looking for jobs and talking about goals for clients.

Also, he will be working on retention clients, people who have jobs but need software updates, additional training on new equipment, etc. OVR has traditionally been helping with retaining employment - which part of the stuff should be paid for by the employer and which by BBVS. Reasonable Accommodation requests under ADA could actually be the employer's responsibility.

The office is going to try to standardize this process. There are times when providing the equipment has to be done because the employer can't afford to buy whatever is needed. They are developing a process for Spero to work with the rest of the staff.

Shannon and Marci from OVR will be having a meeting with CareerLink to work on accessibility to their platforms.

Chris asked if GTCB and PCB could be available as adult role models for the job seekers.

Spero thought that the virtual job club might be good for those of us who have been employed to help the new job seekers.

Joe asked Shannon to talk about the Business Enterprise program which has been restructured in recent years.

She started by telling us that the first thing that they do is to have candidates for the program do a 5-day trial to see if the agency and the client want to do something like this.

In the training if the person decides that it is right for them, the client is exposed to O&M, Assistive Technology, Vision Rehab Therapy and business management. The BEP program internally has more structure so that the BBVS offices can more easily determine who really might be a good candidate. There is a counselor checklist to help with the decision making. At least one person has a job now after the BEP training.

Shannon will find out what is being used for bookkeeping to help the clients manage their business.

Joe asked Shannon to give the placement statistics for the office.

She told us that the goal for the year is 98 job placements. They have 15 in the last quarter. The numbers get better later in the year. One client got a full-time job at William Pitt Student Union as a receptionist. Another client placed full time at UPMC medical records. This one may have been a retention case.

Mike Zaken asked about new hires.

Shannon said that they put in a recommendation for a VRT position. They also had a recommendation for a Social Worker, but they are not allowed to fill it. The half person that they are splitting with Erie is still in the works.

Spero told us that there were a lot of hoops to negotiate from first interview to actual hire.

Joe brought up the possibility of GTCB helping the local BBVS office do an employment fair or some other event that GTCB could cover some of the costs.

Shannon thought that could be a possibility.

Something like Vision Works will still be done this year. Work Matters has been turned over to OVR.

Tom said that we need to think about cost sharing or at least not spending as much as was spent on Vision Works last year by BBVS.

Tom updated us on the status of any BBVS activity at the PCB Conference in October 2019 in Harrisburg. He got in touch with Nicole Wade, the Director of the Harrisburg office, to let her know that we are having our Conference and might be able to provide some space for them to have a program at our event. Nicole also got back to Shannon to try to arrange a conference call with this office to see how much time this could take. There is less space in the Harrisburg Crowne Plaza for meeting rooms, so this may well not work as well as it did in Pittsburgh. PCB is thinking about whatever is presented being for someone other than just the younger worker finishing school.

Joe asked Shannon to talk about FabLab.

Shannon didn't have space at CMU available for the STEM Event this year. They are replacing the Stem or STEAM event with FabLab at the Carnegie Science Center on May 2 and May 3, 2019. There will be four sessions with as many as ten participants in each session.

STEAM will be in 2020 and the addition of Arts will allow for the exposure of more students. Shannon thinks that she will have dates for STEAM by some time in March 2019.

Since our next CAC meeting has been scheduled for May 3, 2019, we raised the question of whether we should move it. Joe said that we ought to get the minutes to Shannon by the April 21 week.

Chris asked about those criteria that belong in files as they are passed from counselor to O&M or VRT. Spero asked whether he would be using the counselor's case notes or if there is something more basic.

There is an internal referral that takes place between Social Workers and VR counselors for VRT and O&M workers. The VRTs are required to work with 32 consumers a year going into their homes and determining what they need.

They set priorities of who should be served first since the backlog for VRT work was 3 years.

Unit supervisors worked out that the top tier is job retention, job jeopardy, new job placements, health and safety issues, primary caregiver no longer there, someone living alone who needs appliances marked, delay in institutional placement, new or sudden blindness probably as a result of an accident or medical condition, and students needing college or university indoor or outdoor mobility training.

Second tier, new residence needing appliances marked but has support, someone with no support limited services in rural area, limited finances.

Tier 3 usually has had services from BBVS earlier, has support but wants to gain more skills, regaining independence, new tasks or location in the community, in assisted living or supervised living.

The office developed a Social Worker and VRC assessment for instructional service referrals.

This helps the newer employees in all positions.

Nature of vision loss and medical issues: has there been a low vision evaluation, do they use assistive devices, psychological or coping issues, depression, anxiety, easily frustrated, difficulty with executive functioning and decision-making skills, substance abuse problems, functioning issues, daily living skills, changes in functioning, cognitive issues, environmental issues, safety issues, environmental smells or toxicities, any kinds of support from family, is there a caregiver. The case management system has all this information. There is a functional assessment that has to be completed after the pre-application but before the services are determined. By doing this they hope to rule out inappropriate referrals.

This assessment prioritizes the clients with the staff available.

Larry brought up new business.

Larry nominated Shannon for the Governor's award just before the deadline at the end of January 2019. He listed her accomplishments in the past year. She made changes, innovations, improvements in the office using her creativity. She coordinated three events.

Shannon wrote up a Governor's award nomination for the office because the office has become very much more Lean. The office was reconfigured with the idea of better efficiency. They got rid of the documents that they didn't need under current retention standards. They itemized surplus items and reclaimed items that could be repurposed for consumers. The internal P-drive was reorganized. There is an electronic calendar available that keeps track of items so that meetings can be cancelled more easily if the person holding the meeting isn't available, etc. The office established a Lean committee to improve processes in the office continuously. This is a team award if it is approved.

The award will be given in May 2019 some time in Harrisburg. We may all want to go.

We all agreed that it was time to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted by Christine Hunsinger