

## **Minutes for CAC Meeting held Friday, May, 3, 2019**

The Citizens Advisory Committee for the Pittsburgh BBVS office met at the office on May 3, 2019. The meeting began at 10:05 A.M.

In attendance were Spero Pipakis, Barb Peterson, Joe Wassermann, Rich Fischer, Shannon Austin, Mike Zaken (who joined by phone after he got the Conference Bridge number which had been changed), Chris Hunsinger and Larry Shock.

The motion was made to adopt the minutes from the February 2019 meeting. The recording didn't pick up the voice of the person making the motion, but the second was by Rich Fischer.

That motion carried.

Joe Wassermann brought us up-to-date with the work that PCB and other blindness stakeholders had done by the beginning of May to make the position that we don't want complete combination of OVR and BBVS clearly stated to the Department of Labor and Industry. Chris Hunsinger pointed out that at the most recent PARC meeting, agency council read a statement showing there were no such plans. Rich Fischer asked for more details about these possibilities. Shannon reviewed the discussions. She pointed out that BBVS is not expecting sweep-up funds, but many cost-saving plans are being discussed. She again stated that combining departments wouldn't be an easy fix because of contracts, bargaining unit issues and other differences within the operating environment. Shannon said that BBVS and OVR are working on cost savings in PETS to better understand how to spend that money wisely and efficiently. She said other cost savings approaches dealing with office budgets and overtime are also still on the table.

Shannon knows there are 105,000 students identified with IEPs in the State, but it is likely there are 130,000 students with IEPs. That doesn't include students with disabilities without IEPs or students with 504 plans. College students no longer have IEPs but can still qualify for PETS. Therefore, the agency has to figure out how to spend this money more wisely, since it has been taken from the Adult programs the agencies offer.

Chris brought up the closing of the Order of Selection which would be another cost-saving decision. Shannon explained that the most severely disabled who have impairments in at least three areas, severely disabled, and not severely disabled are the three categories of disability and that no new cases in any of these categories can begin if Order of Selection is closed. Public meetings are scheduled later in May 2019 to explain these changes and get comments. Eight states across the country have closed the Order of Selection. They have found out that the money they had thought was a cap for PETS is actually the base for PETS, so that funding isn't being affected. But they still have to be more efficient with the use of that money. There is a management team which includes Shannon that is working on those plans. They are looking at everything from how the provider agreements are being structured to how services in the agency are being authorized and more. Shannon felt at the beginning of May that the Secretary of Labor and Industry was being consulted on any of these changes by the Acting Directors of BBVS and OVR. When we talked about the money problems, Chris mentioned that perhaps interested parties should be putting pressure on legislators for additional funds to limit the impact of these changes. Shannon pointed out that any cost-

saving activity should not water down the specialized programs of BBVS. She also mentioned the people in OVR who are Rehab Counselors for the deaf and hard-of-hearing are very specialized too.

Joe again mentioned that we need someone from the education side, perhaps someone from the Intermediate Units, on this advisory council.

Shannon suggested that BBVS would be in touch with the local contacts in the Intermediate Unit to get participation from their side in this group.

There is a statewide efficiency study for a leaner agency which was similar to what the local office did.

Spero gave us an update on his business rep work.

He has 9 men and 9 women in his employment readiness group. These people were referred from counselors. This includes everything from no prior work to Master's Degree people. The people with more work experience have more desire to get that next job. People lost jobs due to layoff, deteriorating vision or for many other reasons.

He has 2 people who are taking the City Civil Service test. Someone is starting work on Monday. The person may have found that job on her own, but Spero pushed for the AT evaluation for this person.

He will be starting group conference calls. He has been finding out that people who say they are computer literate really are not. They tell him that websites are not accessible when in fact the people themselves just don't know how to accomplish tasks with Assistive Technology. He encouraged one member of the group to go to BVRSP for the Promote Office Training they offer. She found a reason not to go at the last minute.

Employer issues:

One of Spero's people had a job offer. But when he called the national people for the company explaining that we need time to get the adaptive software installed and have someone local get back to him, they withdrew the job offer instead. They wouldn't give him the time, and they wouldn't even accept any additional help from the agency to get the person hired.

He has an ongoing discussion with ComCast about whether they have accessible jobs. His first contact said that the accessibility depends on the severity of the impairment. He then tried getting in touch with the Vice President for Accessibility from Philadelphia, who also has vision loss, who admitted the call center software isn't accessible. They want to do a pilot program and Spero is up for it being here. We have skilled AT people, PC people and dedicated District Office, but no further info by the beginning of May.

Spero was at a meeting with Goodwill and CVS who are working on a plan to both train and hire in-store and customer service people with disabilities who they train at Goodwill. Spero asked if they had both the Accessible Point of Sale equipment and if the customer service software is Accessible. The answer was no, but it could come in the future.

Spero visited libraries to discuss libraries giving people with vision loss help with resumé writing. The Library for the Blind was positive, as were other regional libraries. CareerLink has screen readers, but their staff may not know anything about how to use them or get them going.

Turnover is high in that agency so awareness training probably has to come fairly often. It was suggested that Spero make his contact at CareerLink be the contact with Department of Labor and Industry.

Spero has a call in with the resort at Nemaquin because he has a customer who lives in Fayette County who would like to work there. Barb pointed out that she thinks that a couple of people from Uniontown with vision loss work there.

We talked a little about accessible phone systems. Spero talked about how he manages his office Skype from his iPhone instead of from his actual desk phone because that doesn't talk.

Spero is finding out that his customers don't know as much as they think they know about Assistive Technology. He has a good relationship with Pitt and the City of Pittsburgh.

He is going to try to contact local legislators offices to use them for referrals, but there are not yet any recent Business Services brochures for him to distribute.

He is hoping to create an accessible workplace or accessible job database.

Once a determination for an employer is made by an agency, that information should be available to all BBVS offices. Perhaps this could also include "single Point of Contact" people from the companies.

Barb asked about clarification of his relationship to imbedded employees serving the disabled in local big employers. He and someone from the OVR office are working together.

Larry Shock gave us info on both summer programs of Summer Academy and Junior Summer Kutztown. Junior Summer Academy is June 19 thru June 22, 2019. The costs have been reduced by partnering with Special Education Department. There will be no PETS funds used for this program. That means the child doesn't have to have an established relationship with BBVS. The cost for Junior Summer Academy is now \$2,000. There are 20 students expected to participate with 3 students from the Pittsburgh office who have the same Social Worker.

Summer Academy made significant cost savings. It is only two weeks this year from July 13 thru July 26, 2019. The cost is now \$13,000 per student. Another cost savings is there will be no college credit for the class the students take to get a feel for college work. Looking at the costs for the agency for both programs this year, there is a saving of more than \$90,000 over last year with these cost-cutting measures. The Pittsburgh office has 5 students scheduled to go to the Summer Academy in State College out of the 30 expected to attend.

They are being much more selective in how the funding is being derived as far as which part comes from PETS and which comes from BBVS OVR money. The emails are not clear as to how much of the funding comes from Special Education.

Shannon pointed out that Summer Academy has been working using a particular funding structure which may well be re-evaluated now to determine what parts of the costs can be handled under which program, whether Auxiliary Aids or convenience items can be funded under a particular program. Housing costs cannot be funded under PETS.

Spero asked about the possibility of using the Extended School Year as an argument to fund the program through Education funding. Rich and Larry explained that to use the extended school year argument, you would have to prove that regression and two other "r" words [recoupment?] would occur if it were not in place. Since these programs are teaching augmented skills, that argument probably wouldn't work. Some providers of service working with some school districts have used the Extended School Year argument to get education funding, but it all depends on how the justifications are written.

Spero asked whether the Summer Academies are put out for bid at different colleges and universities. That may well happen in the future. New procurement rules may affect this process.

The Overbrook program is still taking place, but Larry didn't have much about that program.

Shannon added there were no referrals to that program from the Pittsburgh office this year.

The counselors usually keep the referrals in their own area for the students. In this office they encouraged workers to refer students to local jurisdictions for summer employment giving them 6 weeks of work experience. There are 4 such referrals for this summer at 30 hours a week.

Joe asked about any statistics showing effectiveness of Summer Academy in creating better student outcomes for participants in light of the fact that this program has been going on for more than 10 years. He pointed out that when he attended an ACBP meeting held in Pittsburgh about 3 years ago, he was told there were no statistics showing that there was a benefit to the program. That doesn't mean that there were no benefits to attendance. It just means there were no measures in place to quantify them and rate the program for effectiveness.

Shannon suggested that she would use these programs as examples in her program evaluation class this summer to try to come up with answers to such questions. She would have to see if using this information for the class would be allowed by the State. She and 3 other doctoral students would have to build a framework for evaluation using the data both from the programs and from student outcomes afterwards. They aren't even sure what would be the appropriate measures of success such as more independence, employment, post-secondary education, case closures to employment, current students, or students from the past.

Spero pointed out that expectations are important in helping people achieve employment and independence.

Barb Peterson spoke about BVRSP programs. They are offering a summer program July 8 thru July 26, 2019 called Adjustment to Blindness. Last year they had 6 students and they hope for more this year. They also cut the program from 5 weeks to 3 weeks.

The second summer program is Technology and Employment.

Participants split their days between Technology work and Employment job sites. Barb is not sure how long that program runs this summer. BVRSP is also offering their Promote program. They started a session at the end of April. The class is 4 weeks. They started with 6 people, and the first drop out occurred in the first 2 days. This title stands for Professional Mastery of Technology for Employment.

They got grant funding for the equipment and also scholarship money. They hope to get college students in one of the sessions in the future so they can learn better how to get their computers to do what they want them to do.

National Industries for the Blind is involved with this program.

Spero pointed out that even entry level office jobs require fair knowledge of office skill programs and social media.

Joe asked Barb about updates on White Cane Day. Will it continue in Market Square? Will BVRSP be finding additional partners?

Joe asked about staff updates at BBVS locally.

Pittsburgh put in a request for Social Worker and the shared O&M / VRT position with Erie. The applicants found other jobs. Pittsburgh is down two Social Workers and 1 VRT. A VR counselor left in late March 2019. The counselor got a job with UPMC Partners that she could do from home with higher pay.

Joe asked what about statistics for the office.

Larry gave us numbers. Goal for the full year for employment closures is 98 closures, and they had 39 when he last closed out the statistics. The year ends at the end of June 2019 and the statistics went through April. Since they have only 3 VR counselors, the workloads are difficult.

Shannon pointed out that PETS emphasis changed the focus of employees to some degree. Supportive Employment changes have made several more steps to achieve a closure. The system isn't smart enough so everyone is waiting on reports from each other when tasks are done. There are several more steps to the process.

Training this year has been on policy and not on procedures so people aren't getting a boost in job knowledge and expertise but using time to understand what is allowable.

In the past there weren't many School for Blind Children cases, but now with 511 cases with more severe disabilities, the cases are more complicated.

Spero's effect on the office employment closures has not yet become apparent as he has only been working there since November 2018.

BBVS is working with Bender Consulting teaching self-advocacy, PC and mobile skills and software packages. Students will be able to do either a 25-week course or a 17-week course. This will ultimately give a person the ability to do Accessibility testing both on kiosks and

websites. All BBVS offices will have access to the platform for referrals. This is designed for High school juniors, seniors and college students. This is still in the process of developing the program.

Larry has more statistics.

Independent older blind through April 2019 had 99 closures and the goal is 135. They have 3 Social Workers to do this.

O&M has a goal of 96. By the end of April 2019 they had 76 cases.

VRT has a goal of 72. They now have 99 by the end of April 2019.

Shannon reported on Business Enterprises.

Business Enterprises program uses a module system and they have to pass each module with a 75% score. The bookkeeping is QuickBooks. Shannon went through the different modules in the course. They use the Hadley course.

Mike says that they have improved accessibility of QuickBooks. Some group from New York and New Jersey had this accessibility work ongoing.

They said that they would get us a number of people in the training program. Not only are there stands but also highway rest areas, and combined site bidding for small facilities.

Joe asked about NDEAM National Disability Awareness Month, which is October 2019.

Shannon mentioned that she is talking to CCAC, GTCB and OFCCP or some other acronym.

Also, Shannon was working on the money stuff. She would probably be moving a little away from Vision Works and also trying to see what the Employment Summit will become.

Larry had a few successes he wanted to tell us about.

One was a deaf-blind individual who worked at the post office. He had been losing more of his vision and hearing. For 3 years he was doing no work just sitting in the break room becoming more isolated.

He now is more involved in communication using basic communication cards. He has learned basic Braille, so he is much more engaged at work advocating for himself and communicating with others at work. There were changes in management, some problems that were determined to be learning disability issues. They have determined that the post office has need for training to help with deaf employees and didn't know how to work best with them.

The other individual that Larry mentioned was a person who has his own business named Phil. Phil owns a business called Gamestop. He has been helped by the O&M Specialist to use BlindSquare, Be My Eyes, and Nearby Explorer. Be My Eyes helps him know what is around him. He now feels he has more confidence which helps him know where he is and has confidence when he gets into difficulties.

Old Business:

Shannon didn't get the award she had been nominated for and the BBVS office didn't get the award it had been nominated for either.

New Business: None.

Next two meetings August 2, 2019 and November 1, 2019 – both are Friday dates.

We have to think about new officers.

Spero asked if we could expand the membership to include some people from other counties. We pointed out that we have Washington County, Westmoreland County, Green Fayette, Beaver county who participate some of the time.

Meeting Motion was made by Chris to adjourn and that carried even without a second.

Respectfully submitted by Chris Hunsinger