

Notes for the Pittsburgh BBVS CAC Meeting held on November 15, 2019

The meeting was called to order shortly after 10:00 a.m. at the BBVS office at 531 Penn Avenue in Pittsburgh, PA. The meeting began with some delays because of Business Skype issues. We had problems with the access code to the phone system.

Attendees: Mike Zaken co-chair of the CAC, Carla Hayes, who joined part of the way through the meeting; and Tom Burgunder, attended by phone. Joe Wassermann, Co-chair; Chris Hunsinger, Secretary of the CAC; Barb Peterson, BVRS Pittsburgh; Larry Shock, Assistant District Administrator of BBVS Pgh office; and Sarah Vogel, District Administrator of BBVS Pgh office attended in person.

We had difficulties dealing with the minutes for the August 2019 CAC meeting because the recording of the meeting was accidentally deleted for the August meeting. We couldn't therefore vote to adopt them. The minutes which were sent out were the 2018 August minutes.

Sarah Vogel introduced herself to the group with a brief biography. She has a Masters in Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh and credentials in Human Services Management. She has been in the field for 20 years or so. She has worked in child welfare and mental health, local government, nonprofits, and state government. She came to OVR again in 2014 and most recently held the Early Reach Coordinator state-wide position before coming to BBVS.

Sarah has experience in volunteering community boards in sports. She supervised an internship program at University of Pittsburgh. Sarah has worked with blind individuals, but does not have specific formalized blindness or visual impairments training.

Joe asked Sarah what attracted her to BBVS. Sarah said that she is willing to learn. She deals in processes and systems. She felt that she could be an effective administrator in this position given her policy interests. She hopes that we will all give her a chance to learn.

Sarah's local government work was in child welfare and she did non-profit work in mental health. She has worked being conscious of funding streams coming from both Federal and State Government when working at the local level either in government or non-profits. Her state-wide positions at OVR gave her a broader view of the financial picture as well.

Larry says that Sarah has the same passion to learn as Shannon Austin had when she came to the BBVS office.

Larry turned the Staffing questions over to Sarah.

BBVS Staffing issues: There is a clerical opening (CT2 just retired), two VRC positions and one O&M position. BBVS previously submitted Requests to Fill for 2 VRCs, one VRT position and, a while ago a social worker position. The status of some Requests to Fill had not yet been decided when we had the meeting.

The Erie and Pittsburgh combo job not any longer on the board. That means that this office can fill possibly a VRT and/or an O&M position. But everything had been on hold before the

new fiscal year began for funds from the Federal Government in October 2019. New funding year looking to fill a VRT position and an O&M position.

BBVS lost Danielle Dawgiello in August 2019. She was a VRC and got promoted to another office. They can explore an internship for a VRC. Central office looks at the census for each office to determine whether an additional staff member in a particular field is needed or can be justified. Barb asked about BVRSP taking up some slack for O&M people if there is a waiting list in that area.

Cindy Rosentreter came in as a guest speaker to talk about Launch Academy. Cindy is one of four PETS supervisors in the Pittsburgh BVRSP office, with Early Reach being part of her workload. She supervises 4 Early Reach Coordinators. Launch Academy is a program which deals with Pre-Employment Transition Services students, or PETS students. Early Reach primarily does the Launch Academy, but they get help from other employees in providing the services. This program works with both CCAC Allegheny and CCAC South. This is a week-long program through the regular OVR office – meaning BVRSP, not BBVS. This program also coordinates with Juvenile Justice. The program accepts up to 25 students at each campus, those being students with open cases and potentially eligible students. Parents can come.

On the first day, the morning was used to cover registration, rolls, expectations, and financial aid including when to apply for post-secondary programs. They tour colleges, training schools, workplaces, and trade schools. They expect students to be able to get to the site for the program independently. They provide group services like independent living, self-advocacy, job exploration, and work-based learning scheduled around the main tour components of the week. They also build a budgeting and nutrition module into the lunch period throughout the week.

Each student completes a self-assessment and staff does an assessment as well. This helps the student learn about expectations for the student. All forms are uploaded to CWDS for the counselors in case students do open a case. They do mock interviews with the students by the end of the week. Students get feedback on their interview performance and then get a certificate. No BBVS students attended this Launch Academy. She says all events can be shared, but they have not been shared in the past.

Sarah said perhaps there should be more collaboration between the bureaus. Somehow BBVS has not been as much a part of this state-wide emphasis on PETS with one-week programs as might be possible. No work has been done yet to make the Launch program accessible to people with vision loss.

This brings up the contracting issue for providing services to the 105,000 students not being covered by the PETS program. The “My Work” Initiative has recently had some students from BBVS involved. Education of providers and staff has to open more people to collaboration if it is to happen.

Barb brought up the issue of getting kids into any program. BVRSP had a 3-week program that only served two BBVS kids, and OVR had a one-week program that didn't serve any BBVS kids. These kids shouldn't be at home in the summer. The planning model for the Launch Academy includes more than OVR and Juvenile Justice so there might be other ways to get people involved. Chris asked how Juvenile Justice is part of the Disability community.

Juvenile Justice, poverty, and child welfare programs identify children who need these services. These programs may be considered aspirational for some of the children. Potential eligibility is the key to participation. IEPs and 504 plans are part of what defines who is eligible.

Joe pointed out that this program sounds like it could serve some students who are not able to participate in the Summer Academy that BBVS and the Department of Education run each summer. Last summer Pittsburgh BBVS had 3 students in Summer Academy. Karen Walsh-Emma told Larry that both Junior Summer Academy and Summer Academy had been funded for 2020.

Jim Joyce came in and talked to us about White Cane Day held on October 2, 2019 at Market Square. He summarized White Cane Day for Larry. Jim, Rush Blady, and Katie Minerich came to the event. This year White Cane Day was held in conjunction with a health fair that the Duquesne Pharmacy School organized. BVRSP was there with its chocolate pretzel canes along with a hand-out about the White Cane Law, and seven GTCB people came. Bonnie Dodson Burk came with other kids and teachers from Pittsburgh Public Schools.

BBVS didn't have social workers or counselors to talk about possible non-vocational help since BBVS has Order of Selection issues. There was no information being handed out about Adult Special Services, older blind or O&M activity that people could take advantage of from BBVS.

Spero Pipakis joined the meeting to report on the Accessible Job fair held on October 23, 2019 at the county Human Services Building. This was for BBVS customers. They started planning in the summer. Rob Hodapp from business services in the OVR office helped identify employers interested in hiring visually impaired people. They tried to avoid employers whose jobs seemed not to fit the profile of someone with vision loss. They contacted the State Apprenticeship Program, Civil Service, Goodwill CVS, City of Pittsburgh, and other organizations. Giant Eagle and Pitt University came. BBVS made an effort to sign up their clients. Of the 21 customers who signed up, 12 showed up for the Job Fair.

Spero thought that this was a good event even though they only had 12 customers there, but the fact that the President came to town disrupting traffic may have affected both employer and client participation. The people who came were happy with the services.

It appeared that one client actually was ready to try for a job with Giant Eagle. Spero answered Barb's question that the client who was looking for a job at Giant Eagle talked with Mike.

The City sent someone from their Civil Service Department. The City representative also asked about help for a granddaughter and a parent with vision loss. Spero told us that the City has an imbedded staff person helping place disabled people in positions whose name is Thomas Sullivan. Mr. Sullivan works for Bender Consulting. Spero thanked all who helped. That included O&M instructors, GTCB and other BBVS staff. This was the first Job Fair independent of the rest of the agency.

Two people have been placed by BBVS as IRS hires and are being trained. Spero is hoping that apprenticeship programs may well be an answer for people since many people with vision loss don't have much work history. There is a pre-apprenticeship program

for Hospitality which is primarily housekeeping and one for sewing. He hopes that these programs and BVRSP can work together.

The city is realizing that their software is not as accessible for people with vision loss as it could be. The 311 office had already notified the company providing their software that it would have to be accessible when next updated which might allow for someone with vision loss to get a job.

Joe brought up the activity between Area Agency on Aging and BBVS. Larry brought us up to date. He had talked with Donna Lambie who reminded him that in August 2017 Tonya Burke and Russell Grovalic talked to the office about Area Agency on Aging waiver and options programs. BBVS learned about who could qualify for these programs, and BBVS told AAA about older blind programs.

This office is referring people to AAA in Allegheny county. It doesn't seem like AAA is referring people back to BBVS.

We asked about the other counties in the BBVS area jurisdiction being contacted. Larry said that there might be something done in other counties now that there is an additional supervisor. The other counties do things somewhat differently from the way that Allegheny County does them.

Chris summarized the Harrisburg PCB convention and spoke about the participation of the Harrisburg local BBVS office being low.

Tom Burgunder pointed out that there was a completely different level of commitment to any participation by the Harrisburg office when compared to the Pittsburgh office. Harrisburg only finally committed to a display table in the exhibit hall.

Chris talked a little about the survey that PCB had conducted and mentioned that we gave Shannon a copy of the survey which pointed out the concerns we have been hearing about from clients throughout the years. The survey was expected to be on the PCB website.

Carla pointed out that the exhibit hall was worthwhile for exhibitors so BBVS shouldn't sell it short. She was surprised herself as an exhibitor how many people came to the exhibit area. .

We talked about scheduling meetings for 2020. Joe asked if there was a reason that we try to keep the meetings to the first Friday of the second month of the quarter? Would another day of the week work better?

Carla is happy with the Friday time since it fits into her schedule well. Barb mentioned that if you miss meetings you can be knocked off the CAC, but she often has Friday staff meetings. Tom pointed out that we can allow for excused absences. The dates of February 7, May 1, August. 7, and November 6, 2020 have been chosen for meeting dates.

The bylaws indicate that it is time to pick new officers, but since our meeting had so few attendees, we decided to pick officers at the Feb. 2020 meeting. Joe reminded us that he doesn't want to co-chair the committee any more.

Mike made a motion to postpone the election of officers to the next meeting to be held on Feb. 7, 2020. Tom suggested that we put this information out about seeking nominees for the positions of secretary for the CAC and co-chairs for the CAC in the minutes. We didn't get a second, but we agreed to change the nomination and voting for officers.

Tom also suggested that when the meeting notice goes out with the phone number, there also be a number that people can call to let the office know that there is an issue with their getting into the meeting if the number changes. Larry agreed that this would be a good practice.

Chris asked if routinely the CAC minutes are being sent on to other places since in the combined state plan it is shown that they use the CAC minutes as one of the items to keep track of consumer and agency coordination. Larry said that he would look into the glitch in the minutes distribution for August 2019. Tom agrees to work with Mike as a co-chair. Chris is willing to remain as secretary. Any other nominees willing to serve can be brought to the meeting.

They didn't bring number of cases cleared and closures to the meeting, but Larry says that they still have 14 people in the waiting list since order of selection has been closed as they did in August. Larry says that they are now looking more at changing how employees think of disabilities.

There will be training coming up for employees clarifying the definitions of Most severely disabled, severely disabled and not severely disabled. Waiting list is Status 11 but once order of selection is reopened, will the definition of most severely disabled still consider most people with vision loss to be most severely disabled? This shouldn't change people already on the waiting list Sarah clarified that the office would be getting their training on this topic on December 18, 2019 and that it had been determined that the changes would be minor enough that there wouldn't be any board activity necessary to implement the changes. Sarah said that she thought that the people coming off the list would be in date order only not time and date.

Chris Hunsinger and Barb Peterson made and seconded motion to adjourn the meeting.
Respectfully Submitted by Chris Hunsinger