

Minutes for Virtual CAC meeting Pittsburgh BBVS held on Aug. 7, 2020

The meeting was held telephonically and via Skype for Business.

In attendance were Tom Burgunder, Co-Chair; Rich Fisher; Carla Hayes; Chris Hunsinger, Secretary; Sue Lichtenfels; Terri Lucas; Bob Nagy; Barb Peterson; Larry Shock, Assistant District Administrator BBVS Pgh; Sarah Vogel, District Administrator, BBVS Pgh; Joe Wassermann, and Michael Zaken, Co-Chair.

Carla Hayes moved, and Rich Fisher seconded the acceptance of the May 2020 meeting minutes. The motion carried.

Staff updates: Sarah gave the report.

There is a hiring freeze. There has been a recent retirement and another pending. Harold Longmore has taken a temporary position in the State Central Office so Sarah is filling in as the VR Supervisor.

The office has put in a special request for a waiver so that the positions needed in the office can be filled. It could be a temporary transfer or some other creative method to temporarily solve the issues caused by these changes. They requested a VR Supervisor, a VR Counselor, a Social Worker and a clerical position.

Many offices are in this situation. Mike Zaken asked when the freeze would or could be lifted? Sarah said there is a rumor that the freeze will or may be lifted in January 2021.

Chris asked about job sharing between offices. That has not been done, but the office will be adding an actual day in the office beginning 8/10/2020 to take care of more things that cannot be handled remotely. The results of the extra office day will be evaluated to see if the change is significant in helping the office process the work. Other offices will be asked for assistance. Shari Dipietro is pitching in to help another clerical position.

Telework Status.

Mike asked about telework and the status of how employees are getting along with that method of working.

Sarah said there were the initial bumps caused by a new method of working, but now everyone is waiting for additional guidance for instructional staff to be able to do face-to-face work with clients. The office is not doing face-to-face interaction with customers, but service providers are able to have face-to-face interaction. Sarah is on the Return to Work Task Force which has been told to put plans on hold.

Larry is on an Instructional Staff Task Force assessing what can be done virtually and what needs face-to-face contact.

Chris asked if particularly O&M was being considered in figuring out virtual ways to do some of the work. Larry said O&M Jim Joyce has been active in locating resources and methods for people to work virtually with O&M instructors and different navigation

platforms. Jim had been checking with other facilities throughout the country for advice to try to determine best practices.

Mike encouraged the office to continue with innovative ways to work in this environment.

Launch Academy:

This is a local program through BVRS.

It became HOVR, not Launch Academy, as a virtual event. There are two events: One event was in July 2020 with 4 students the first week and 12 the second week. Another event is scheduled for later in August 2020 with 9 students. One BBVS student attended the first session, and they have had no feedback of problems. BBVS got assurance from BVRS that appropriate information was in place and spoke to the mom of the student to be sure everyone was onboard.

They did a virtual day in a college, virtual mock interviews, job awareness and job demonstrations from employers. The student from BBVS had an aid to help; they used Skype for Business.

Overbrook Summer Program was cancelled this year for those non-academic track people.

Junior Summer Academy was cancelled. Virtual Summer Academy did take place. It was one week for 20 students. All involved learned a lot about virtual school. The Pittsburgh office had three participants. Tom got clarification that Junior Summer Academy would have been up to ninth grade or so.

Spero report:

Accessibility Shield is a company trying to determine accessibility of websites. They are looking for candidates who can evaluate websites. Bob Nagy began working for this company.

Spero noticed that the number of positions of working from home have dropped off very recently.

PICK UP He pointed out that the work on Windows accessibility that BVRSPA has been doing with its Virtual Office classes for mastering Office seems to be successful, but it needs to keep going because even entry level positions require some familiarity with using these programs.

A former customer and then later employee Allison Malloy have moved to Ohio so Spero hopes to connect with her to get some ideas about how another state is handling this Business Rep position. Spero is working on adapting the Business outreach training information created by BVRS to be both virtual and possibly lean toward answering questions concerning hiring people with vision loss. Also, he is noticing that Career Links is making itself more accessible to people with vision loss, and they do have experience recruiting employers.

Career links has resume writing expertise that they can pass on to potential customers who are looking for jobs.

Spero has been seeing virtual job fairs, and he has been encouraging his customers to try them to get their feet wet.

Spero noticed that he found new people for his business rep services when he was doing Check-ins for the office. There were customers that he was not aware of whose counselors had not referred to him.

He hopes to filter the VR talent Pipeline spreadsheet by county and get info about those who are looking for jobs even if they have not been referred to him so that he can query the counselors if he sees a likely position.

Jeff Seaberry has a position which is supposed to develop internships and apprenticeships for people with disabilities.

That might allow a person to try a position when either the employer or the customer has some reservations about how the position would fit.

Spero and Sarah will be meeting once a week to work on how counselors can use his position to help with job placement.

NDEAM coming up in OCT. They want to celebrate both the 30th anniversary of ADA and the 75th anniversary of NDEAM.

The Erie BVRS has found a platform called Labor Connect which they believe will be able to be used for a virtual job fair. They thought that it would work state-wide. They are investigating the accessibility of Labor Connect. The company promised that it would be accessible by the time of the event, but that was the only assurance.

The theme is Accessibility and Opportunity.

The state would pay for the cost for one recruiter for every employer that sends someone. The company, Labor Connect, will then sell additional Labor Connect services.

They, meaning OVR and BBVS, are hoping to set up events for customers on job interview skills, cover letter writing, and resume writing, and for employers on education about disability issues.

Spero has a meeting soon to see how this would work. Spero said that there is just not enough information at the time of our meeting about how the Labor Connect system will work.

They are advising that people have the conference set up by counties with dates for areas of the state.

Supposedly, with the MOU that OVR management and Labor Connect are creating, the plan is to allow for customers to use the platform in the week before the conference to become familiar.

If this Labor Connect doesn't work out, then there is also something called a talent Acquisition portal.

Joe Wasserman asked about what happened with the conversations Spero had talking to PNC back in May. Spero met with PNC and gave guidance about accessibility in the bank system, and he hopes that he is building relationships for the future.

He can't look at their system virtually because of security issues.

Tom asked about including current visually impaired employees in the discussion of the accessibility of their software.

PNC has a disability specialist who is based in Raleigh North Carolina, but the compartmentalized systems of the bank mean that there isn't a lot of communications between or among departments to discuss the overall issues of accessibility. Some of the employees may not have even self-identified to the bank that they have a visual impairment.

Sue pointed out that her husband, Bob, works for PNC. The bank has a new department head for accessibility and Bob applied for an open position in that department. She recommended that Spero and Bob talk.

PNC is sincere in looking to solve accessibility issues throughout the system.

Spero pointed out that CVS got an award for working with disabled employee customers, but their call center software is not accessible for screen readers.

There was an article in Business Times about Achieva looking for disabled people to work for UPMC. Spero didn't get a call back from the person who Achieva gave him as a contact for the program.

Do they only want certain disabilities to be hired?

How sincere are some of these companies?

Rich pointed out that some employers just want their name on the job fair as hiring disabled people, but they just do enough to keep people from questioning.

Spero pointed out that he had been trying to get something done with Comcast since last year for hiring visually impaired employees, and he was told that they are working on a pilot program for accessible call center information. That was a year ago.

Chris pointed out that she had heard a story from someone at the ACB Conference during the summer about Accessibility of software.

The company can't be held responsible when vendors supply software, and since the vendor is not an employer, they can't be held responsible under ADA either.

Spero said that is a problem he is seeing at Westmoreland Community College. The school as a data base provided by a vendor and it isn't particularly accessible, but Catherine Getchell told him that many college contracts now require accessibility and

ignorance is what is keeping the platforms inaccessible in some cases. The college might be able to have some leverage with a vendor providing an inaccessible platform if the contract indicates that it should be accessible to meet some education requirements. Rich suggested that there should be some accountability before signing the contracts in a best-case situation.

Colleges might be under Title IX which would be dealing with this Accessibility issue from a different perspective.

Status of Order of Selection:

Larry is the coordinator of removing people from Order of selection in the Pittsburgh BBVS office.

Phase III of the order of selection will only have a handful of people coming off the list.

Wave III only has six people coming off the list at the first of August. They are still working on some of the Wave II people.

They are working on the Comprehensive Assessment of many of the Wave II customers.

They make two attempts to contact people and then a closure letter.

Larry has three counselors who he gets disposition information from for these people coming off the list.

There is also a Job Retention aspect of this waiting list, but the criteria are so specific that some people who you might think would qualify are not qualified under the job retention or job jeopardy rules for immediate service. You wonder why they are on the waiting list in the first place.

Carla asked about the job retention issue for herself.

She is hesitant to have her employer get involved in the proof of the job retention issue. Self-employment is not part of this job retention issue, and neither is secondary employment.

The proof of possible Job Loss must be a proven issue.

Chris asked about the disposition of Wave II people. We had the Wave I disposition of ten closed out and five getting started with employment plans.

Larry says that there are thirteen Wave II people needing completion of their disposition. He didn't have information about Wave II people being closed out. How many of the thirty-four people on the waiting list came off in Wave II?

He had it broken down by counselor with one counselor having sixteen people coming off which eight already might have had a disposition of employment plan or closed out. Another counselor had five coming off the wait list with some sort of disposition, and three still on the wait list. That counselor only has two wave III cases.

Larry said that thirty-two people were supposed to come off the waiting list at the beginning of May.

Sue asked if when people tell BBVS that they no longer need services, are they being questioned more closely to see if they are not needing the services. Sarah agreed that counselors should be asking more questions.

Sarah asked if it is up to counselors to explain that a personal situation could be better with additional training.

Sue asked if people could work with social workers even if they said that they no longer are looking for jobs.

If there is an indication of issues involving safety, the customer may be referred to a social worker.

Sarah pointed out that BBVS doesn't have access to some of the data base info that other agencies can use when the contact info being used to recontact isn't good.

White Cane Day:

What is being done was the question for Barb who is from BVRSPA? She said that nothing had been decided early in August. They thought that they might have an answer late in August if Duquesne Pharmacy school still is interested in joining in on a white cane day.

Sue asked as a person thinking outside the box, What about a Facebook Ad or something else on Social Media? Barb said that they already do things about White Cane on their social Media.

Mike suggested newspaper activity.

Customer Satisfaction Survey:

Sarah commented on it. Statewide survey.

She mentioned the question about being stuck with a particular job goal because of blindness and found the answers to be something to think about for all involved.

She felt that the difference between Agreed upon services vs. services delivered might well have some additional explanations.

How does this survey help the agency?

It is possibly a training indicator state-wide, but not so much locally. Sarah says that they will target the issues of appeal rights, and preferred method of accessible info.

New Business:

Carla asked about empowering people by finding ways to get training using virtual platforms giving people help with various other virtual platforms that they could use.

This office only has approval to use Skype and no other virtual platforms.

Carla asked if the office could use other platforms if other organizations host them.

Sarah says that procurement, IT, security, and legal are involved with these decisions for BBVS, but BBVS doesn't have access for its employees to be experienced with these other virtual platforms to give classes. OVR doesn't have a way to help with these platforms yet, but perhaps some of the work groups that BBVS has created to think into the future may well try to answer that.

Carla pointed out that we all need to work on how to use many different virtual platforms.

Sue asked about college student support from BBVS.

Sarah says that students can get training on virtual platforms from vendors, but the big question is about O&M work. They are getting out of state providers for O&M since their staffs are not able to provide services.

Chris asked if the disability offices at colleges and universities are tackling the virtual classroom, and Sarah thought that they are doing it.

Sue asked if the virtual classroom topic is addressed in Summer Academy with the various possibilities for different platforms to be used being addressed.

Sarah said that they didn't have the lesson plans for Summer Academy, but that could be obtained for the next meeting.

She knew that Gus Laffey was part of the team but didn't know what platforms were used since BBVS doesn't have access to anything other than their Skype.

Might the Education part of the state have access to other platforms since the school districts use so many?

There was no motion for adjournment. We all just said good-bye.

Respectfully submitted by Christine Hunsinger, Secretary.