

Minutes for Pittsburgh BBVS CAC Meeting held on May 1, 2020

The meeting convened virtually at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, May 1, 2020.

In attendance: Tom Burgunder, Rich Fischer, Emily Gindelsberger, Carla Hayes, Chris Hunsinger, Greg Lazur, Sue Lichtenfels, Bob Nagy, Barb Peterson, Larry Shock, Joe Wassermann and Sarah Vogel.

A motion was made to approve the February 2020 meeting Minutes as transmitted by Joe Wassermann, seconded by Carla Hayes. The motion was carried.

Staff update as of May 1, 2020: Larry gave the update. There is a hiring freeze and no positions can be filled at present.

The BBVS Pittsburgh office has 2 Social Workers and hopes to fill one additional slot. There are 3 O&M Specialists, but one is retiring later this year. There are currently 2 VRT positions, with one strong candidate about to be hired when the hiring freeze occurred.

There are 3 VR Counselors with a fourth one selected to process as a new hire, but now can't fill that position. There are two CT2 clerical positions, but one is retiring June 26, 2020.

Sue asked if any positions can be filled. The current hiring freeze won't allow filling any positions quickly.

They are looking at other alternatives such as borrowing an employee from another office or at least some hours from another office particularly for the CT2 clerical position.

Professionals may well have to do their own clerical work as Central Office has not as yet approved posting any of the openings.

This is a state budget deficit issue and there is cost-cutting for the state everywhere.

The Constitution mandates that the budget be balanced. Tom pointed out that when the hiring freeze is lifted, Tom pointed out that all agencies will be attempting to hire causing, administrative delays which could well be greater than what agencies have experienced in the past.

Spero Pipakis, BBVS Business Services Rep, provided an update as an employee:

Spero visited CareerLink offices in Westmoreland and Armstrong Counties, Downtown Pittsburgh and Forest Hills before the offices shut down. He was scheduled to visit Indiana County, New Kensington and Butler, but those visits were put on hold.

Spero was checking to see if the CareerLink offices are ADA accessible for visually impaired customers.

Possibly one CareerLink facility had Fusion working on its computers.

Spero did not get to visit all the facilities before they closed down due to COVID-19. He hopes in the future he will be able to meet with the CareerLink facilities regularly.

Gus Laffey, the Access Technology specialist for BBVS, sent some recommendations to the CareerLink offices to bring equipment into compliance so that people who BBVS couldn't serve would be able to use CareerLink services. Spero also hopes that the CareerLink offices will be a place for him to assist his customers in completing job applications and searches on a regular basis, and that he will have regular communications with CareerLink employees as a result.

Spero did a conference call with PNC Financial spearheaded by Rush Blady, a BBVS O&M instructor. Some topics addressed were: What can BBVS and OVR do for them? How can their systems become accessible for both customers and employees? Once travel restrictions are lifted, Spero expects to help address issues in a hands-on way.

John McInerney, the Interim Director of PAB, put BBVS in touch with a company based in Norristown, PA which is a web accessibility testing company. The company is looking to hire testers with vision impairments and train them to check websites for accessibility. This would probably be primarily a work from home type of position.

Spero wants to do this and BBVS was able to get this company on their list of approved vendors. Spero wants to use this company to do on-the-job training for customers, and he has a couple of customers in mind who are currently unemployed. This is a pilot project in the making.

If there is any silver lining to COVID-19 restrictions, it could be that more employers and employees will see the benefits of working from home. Many BBVS customers are not interested in moving from their home location to take a job.

Employers want to work with people but need to check if the software the company is using is accessible. This usually requires an AT assessment be done for any employer being considered. This can take months depending on the complexity of the software and equipment being used. Additional scripting to solve a problem could take more time. Spero has been working to create a database which could be national to collect information about AT solutions in hiring situations.

Spero went to Freedom Scientific who told him that it wouldn't work. Paciello Group and Larry Lewis thought this might work. They are another one of the companies under the Vispero umbrella. They have a pipeline into the developers at Freedom Scientific.

They are working on Paciello group being a vendor for PA BBVS.

BVRSP, Matt Diemert and Gary Looker are often too slow. I don't have the spellings for the names of the vendors Spero mentioned. [Shari found]

CareerLink is run by Workforce Investment Boards. Some of those offices chose to have computers owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or Vocational Rehab so that their IT is done by the State, but other offices had their own computers.

Rob Hodapp wrote a report explaining that CareerLink updated the software from Jaws and ZoomText to Jaws and Fusion, but it was not licensed so it didn't really work.

CareerLink is like the local employment office and funded through WIOA.

Spero also hopes that through CareerLink he can get better relationships with local employers.

Tom asked if other states were doing specialized Business Rep positions like Spero's. Chris mentioned that she had given Spero the job description from New York State. He got information from Iowa as well. He was not able to get in touch with Katie Frederick, who had some possible information about Business Service Rep positions in Ohio.

The Mississippi State National Training Center has found that the most effective way to teach employers about the value of using visually impaired employees is to bring them employees. The training providers must give people the training that the employer needs. Spero has been taking some of the course offerings at The Mississippi State National Training Center.

Carla asked about the free webinars offered by the different Assistive Technology equipment companies like Humanware, Vispero and Microsoft.

Carla also suggested that employers take the time to look at some of the webinars so they can see what Assistive Technology is capable of. The Department of Labor has a group called PEAT (Partnership for Employment and Assistive Technology), which deals with training for people. Staff is looking at doing the webinars.

Carla asked if employers are being asked to look at these webinars. BBVS can't tell employers to do anything. Part of the Business Service Rep position is to become a partner to the employers.

Larry pointed out that Gus Laffey has often talked about how to make the CareerLink offices become uniform.

Greg mentioned that having worked in the field setting up technology - although it was 20 years ago when he worked for Pennsylvania - he thought that a decision from the top agencies could go a long way to make the CareerLink offices more uniform.

Status of Summer Programs provided by Larry: A Launch Academy decision will be made some time soon. They are looking for it to be something virtual.

Junior Summer Academy and Summer Academy have already been cancelled as face-to-face and have turned virtual instead.

The BBVS office was attempting to get their clients involved with Launch Academy for the future.

Greg, speaking from the Education or PATTAN side of the Summer programs, has been told that Junior Summer Academy is not being held. Summer Academy is going to be virtual.

Barb Peterson felt that BVRSP wouldn't be participating in White Cane Day. BBVS said the same.

A Job Fair may well not happen this year because of social distancing.

Chris will check with Bender Consulting and other groups doing national outreach that talks about Virtual Job Fairs.

Order of Selection issues – status given by Larry: Fifteen cases were taken off the closed list in February 2020 by this BBVS office. Counselors contacted those customers, with 5 of them now having active employment plans. Ten cases are in the process of being closed out.

A new Order of Selection dump is scheduled for May 1, opening the wait list today. Pittsburgh BBVS doesn't know how many will be designated for this office. At this time, 4,500 are supposed to be released Statewide from the waiting list. The total list was 8,000.

BBVS Pittsburgh had 9 new people on the Order of Selection closed list this year. While the office has been having limited ability to do usual things, staff have been contacting customers who have been in referral or training status for a long time to see what would be additionally available for them.

Staff status provided by Sarah and Larry: The office had growing pains switching from working in person to working virtually. They needed crash courses in Skype and other ways of working virtually. Staff has been checking in with customers,

doing what might be considered welfare checks. The office is working on what they can do virtually.

Instructional staff has been working in areas that don't require in-person activities. Staff has worked out what they can do virtually versus what they really need to do in person.

Clerical staff (CT2) are in the office 2 days a week to take care of mail, fax, uploading documents, etc. One management – either a DA or an ADA - from BVRS and BBVS share this work so that although there is someone in the office 2 days a week, no one has to be there more than once every two weeks.

No lay-offs because the O&Ms are providing virtual but direct service. And they are moving their work to other aspects of the work that the agency can do.

They have all been working on virtual instruction modules, and more of that kind of instruction is being rolled out.

Shannon Austin will be sending out communications about future plans for the agency, but probably the offices won't be open on May 11. They are working on macro and micro plans for offices.

Sarah wasn't sure if the combined State Plan had been submitted to the RSA before the Lockdown.

New Business: Larry and Sarah couldn't remember digesting the PCB Survey. Chris Hunsinger said she would send it to each of them again.

Tom brought up the issue that Eric from Fayette County mentioned not getting PAB referrals acted on when he sent them to BBVS.

Sarah said there was a meeting scheduled for March 16 and she thought things had been worked out, but they have not really talked since the lockdown came at that time and his office is still closed.

There is no case closure or goal information for this office since COVID-19 has changed expectations.

The next CAC meeting is Friday August, August 7, 2020 starting at 10:00 a.m.

Chris made motion and Carla seconded to Adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by Christine Hunsinger.