

Harrisburg District Office BVRs and BBVS Consumer Advisory Committee Minutes
Tuesday, March 22, 2022.

This meeting took place on Teams and on Skype. In attendance were the following:
Cynthia Gibbs-Pratt, BBVS customer
Jessica Hanula, BBVS VR Supervisor
John Horst, Assistant Chair
Patrick Kane, VR Supervisor, BVRs
Cathy Long, Secretary
Pamela Roberts, possibly a BVRs customer
Bobbi Simmons, former BBVS customer
Rodger Simmons, CAC Chair
Kireston Wilson, BVRs Applicant

Abbreviations in this document:

BBVS: Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services
BVRs: Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
VR: Vocational Rehabilitation

First Note: This meeting was recorded as usual, but for some reason the recording did not show up. As a consequence, all we have are reports from both BBVS and BVRs sent to secretary by email a day or two after the meeting when the discovery was made that the recording did not record. We hope to meet in person at the BBVS and BVRs District Office for our next meeting and continue in that manner unless COVID-19 restrictions close buildings **again**.

Second Note: This meeting was originally to take place on March 15, 2022 but about a week prior to it, Rodger Simmons and Cathy Long wrote to Pat and Jessica requesting that we move the meeting back one week because at that time Pennsylvania was holding its mid-year meeting, which Cathy, Rodger, Bobbi, and Cynthia were attending. We were also talking to legislators about five imperatives we wanted them to take action on. This was all done on Zoom, but it ate up a lot of our time which would not allow us to attend our regular CAC meeting as planned/scheduled. Pat and Jessica did accept this compromise and we did meet on March 22, 2022 instead. Many thanks!

Third Note: Jessica Hanula's job responsibilities are changing and as a result she is stepping down as the BBVS liaison for the CAC. We will now be in the capable hands of Natalie Barbush, VR Supervisor, BBVS. Best wishes to Jessica Hanula in her new role!

Fourth and final note: Several weeks ago John Horst, Assistant Chair, required abdominal surgery. He is recovering well but cannot come to the June meeting in person. He has asked Cathy Long to run this meeting and when he is well, we can discuss next steps.

BBVRS Report: Pat Kane. BVRS goal update 158 successful closures of 265, about 60% of goal at the end of the 3rd quarter of fiscal year.

New staff: Cassandra new VR counselor, started 2-28-2022, Kelly Dague new VR Supervisor starting on 3-28-2022. Central Office: all executives are no longer in their previous roles including Shannon Austin Executive Director, Jerimiah Underhill Deputy Executive Director, John Miller acting BVRS Director, Rod Alcidonis, BBVS Director, and Ralph Roach Central Office Director. Some of these individuals have been assigned to other duties but are still Commonwealth employees. Others are gone. Ryan Hyde is Acting Executive Director. Mari Katona is Acting BVRS Director. Dawn Sokol is Acting BBVS Director. This change occurred on Friday 3/18/2022.

Summer interns: Some of our college students are taking part in the Commonwealth summer internship in various state agencies in and around Harrisburg. We also have a few college students who are taking part in internship opportunities with the Center for Independent Living in Harrisburg.

BBVS Report: Jessica Hanula and notes from Natalie Barbush. Goal updates: VR Counselors have 11 successful closures, with a goal by June 30 to have 35.

Social workers have 33 successful closures and need 45.

Orientation and Mobility Instructors have 26 closures and need 106.

Note this low closure count is due to the inability of Orientation and mobility instructors to work in person with their customers.

Vision Rehabilitation Therapist have 42 and the goal is 72. It is obvious from these numbers that all programs have been impacted because Commonwealth employees were mandated to work remotely and not meet with customers in person.

Staffing update: 2 Social Workers have been given conditional offers, once all of the paperwork is complete, they can be given a start date (currently 1 social worker covering all 8 counties with Supervisor assistance)

1 VR Counselor opening (not posted), 1 VR Counselor still out on medical leave, 2 VR Counselors are currently covering all 8 counties
1 District Administrator position open, it was posted and closed with no further updates.

Summer Programs: I DEAL Summer Program- there will be a weekend program as well as a 6 week program for high school students.
Commonwealth Summer Internship program: BBVS Harrisburg has one college student participating.

STRIVE On: there will be a fall 2022 session for high school students.

New Business. Rodger Simmons and his wife, Bobbi, are moving to Florida. This is his last meeting as Chair. He is resigning. Until we get a new Chair, John Horst will fill in. He is quite qualified to do so. John has over 25 years of employment with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and at least 40 years working and managing the office of Pennsylvania Council of the Blind.

New Business and comments. Kireston expressed that she did not feel that contractors were as dedicated as employees; discovered it is not an OVR contractor. It is Equitas through CareerLink. Kireston met with James H., a BVRS counselor, who had an established relationship with the community. She mentioned that she "hit the jackpot" with James and she expects his level of service with other BVRS workers.

Rodger, Bobbi, Cynthia, and Cathy gave an overview of our mid-winter meetings and briefly went over the legislative imperatives that were discussed with congressmen and senators.

Pennsylvania Council is looking forward to its virtual convention from October 27 through 30, 2022. But before that the American Council of the Blind will be holding a hybrid convention between July 2 and 8, 2022 in Omaha, Nebraska. Chris Hunsinger, President, PCB, is traveling to Omaha. She has asked and Cathy Long accepted the assignment to be a Pennsylvania delegate but will attend the convention via Zoom.

That ended our meeting this time. We will next meet on June 21, 2022 at the BBVS and BVRS office, located at 555 Walnut Street, 8th Floor, Harrisburg, PA. For additional information, call BVRS at 717-787-7834 or BBVS at 717-787-7500.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Long, Secretary